

# PRACTICAL DISCOURSES

Upon several  
Divine Subjects.

V O L. II.

C O N T A I N I N G

A Discourse concerning World-ly and Divine Wisdom.	Concerning Heavenly - Mind- edness.
Concerning Righteous and Unrighteous Judgment.	Of Submission to Divine Pro- vidence.
Concerning Religious Singu- larity.	Concerning the Folly of Co- vetousness.
Concerning the Excellency of Praise and Thanksgiving.	Concerning the Consideration of God, and of the Divine Presence.
The Importance of a Religious Life considered from the happy Conclusion of it.	Concerning doing God's Will on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Written by *JOHN NORRIS*, M.A. Rector  
of *Bemerton* near *Sarum*.

*The Fifth Edition.*

L O N D O N :

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THE  
DISCOURSES

Upon Several  
Divine Subjects

VOLUME II

CONTAINING

1. A Discourse on the Nature and Extent of the Christian's Duty to his Neighbour.  
2. A Discourse on the Christian's Duty to himself.  
3. A Discourse on the Christian's Duty to his Country.  
4. A Discourse on the Christian's Duty to his Family.  
5. A Discourse on the Christian's Duty to his Church.  
6. A Discourse on the Christian's Duty to his World.

By JOHN WILKINS, D.D.  
of the University of Cambridge.

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T O T H E

Right Reverend Father in God,

R I C H A R D,

*Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells.*

My L O R D,

**T**H E peculiar Honour I justly have for your Personal Worth concurring with that Reverence I owe to your Episcopal Character, and that happy Relation wherein I now stand to you as my Diocesan, obliges me to lay these Papers at your Lordship's Feet ; and that which your Eminent *Greatness* has made a *Debt*, your no less Illustrious *Goodness* encourages me to *Pay*. Upon which two inducements (the greatest that can be even in Religious as well as Human Addresses) I humbly presume to tender these plain Discourses to your Lordship's

## *The Epistle Dedicatory.*

favourable Perusal and Acceptance,  
which as they are wholly *designed*,  
so I hope are in some measure *fitted*  
for the Advantage of the Publick ;  
not so much in respect of Notion and  
Speculation, but what is a great deal  
more wanted in this very degenerate,  
tho' otherwise highly Improved Age,  
the promotion of Piety and good  
Life. Which great and excellent end  
that your Lordship may yet much  
better promote, both by the Prudence  
of your Government, and by the  
Brightness and Authority of your  
high Example, to the Honour and  
Interest of our most excellent Church,  
and the Glory of our common Lord  
and Master, shall be the Constant and  
Zealous Prayer of him whose great  
Ambition is to be esteemed

*Your Lordship's*

Most Humble and Dutiful Servant,

J. NORRIS.

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T O T H E

R E A D E R.

*Since the Publication of my former Discourses upon the Beatitudes, having received some Intimations, that 'tis the earnest desire of several Worthy Persons to see some more of my Practical Discourses ; for the gratification of their Pious Curiosity, and for the general Advantage of all other well inclined Persons, I have been persuaded to make a Scrutiny among my Papers, and to pick out a Set of such Discourses as are of the most Practical Composure, and most apt to season the Mind of the Reader with a Tincture of Piety and Vertue : And these I think are of this Character, which I therefore here communicate to the World in the same Matter and Dress for the Main, wherein they were first Penn'd and Preach'd, only bestowing upon them the advantage of a Review, that so they might have that Accuracy and Correctness as might fit them for a Publick Appearance.*

*I am not insensible how well furnished the Present Age is with Provisions of this kind ; so far from that, that I think we have in this*



## To the READER.

respect much the Advantage above any Age or Place in the World : And I think withal, that if there were a Choice Collection made of our English Sermons, especially of the Later times, it might deserve to wear the Honourable Chain in our Publick Libraries, as well as any the best Curiosities we have there, and indeed to turn out a great many dull Wormeaten Authors, which fill our Stalls, as many Persons do the World, Idly and Insignificantly, and are not worth the Room they take up. And I further think, that if the Selectest parts of these our Modern Sermons were ranged under certain Heads, and judiciously sorted and disposed in order, out of these Materials might be framed far the best Body of Divinity, both for the Rational and for the Perswasive part, that is in the World. And 'tis great Pity but that a convenient number of competent Undertakers (for I think it would be too great a Task for any one Person) would agree together upon the Performance. It would I am perswaded be a work of excellent Use as well as Curiosity, and withal a standing Monument of Shame and Condemnation to those of our Dissenters, who are so Silly and so Impudent, as to make this one of their Pleas for leaving the Church, because they have better Preaching in a Conventicle.

But least this should be turned as an Objection against the present performance, that the Age  
is

## TO the READER.

*is so rich in these Provisions, I consider withal on the other side, how much it stands in need of them : Its Supplies indeed are great, but its Necessities are as great and greater ; and till Men come to be persuaded to live better than they now do, more like Men, and more like Christians, I think further Addresses of this Nature will be always Seasonable, and will be so far from needing an Apology, that they will deserve to be encouraged,*

*But there is something else that needs it very much, and that is, the unproficiency of the World under such extraordinary Advantages : 'Tis indeed a thing of strange Consideration, and what I have often admired at, that considering what excellent Preaching and Writing there is now in the World, the World should be no better than it is ; that there should be so much good Discoursing, and so little good Living ; that the Instrument of Religion should be so much Improved, and Religion it self so much Decayed.*

*It must be allowed that the present Age has Advantages of both sorts, Preaching and Writing, far beyond what former Ages could ever boast of ; and that Christians now have Assistances almost as much beyond those of the Primitive Christians, as theirs were beyond those of the Heathen World ; and yet (which is both*  
A 4 *strange*

## TO the READER.

*strange and lamentable to consider,) they excelled us as much in Goodness, as we do them in Learning and Knowledge, and were much better without these Advantages than we are with them. No Learning like Modern Learning, no Reasoning like Modern Reasoning, and yet no Christianity like Primitive Christianity. Now indeed Christianity is better understood, and better defended, and the Rules of it more rationally enforced, but then 'twas better Practised: Now we Discourse better, but we Live worse.*

*What shall we, what can we say to these things? It is our great Shame, and it will be our Condemnation: But we must not give over Medicinal Applications, though the Disease seems not to yield to them, but rather to rage and increase under them; for though we are really worse under these great Assistances, yet I hope 'tis not they that contribute to make us so; and if the World be so bad with them, 'tis to be feared it would be in a much worse Condition without them. The Means are therefore to be continued, whatever the Event and Success be, which is God's concern, not ours. And I further consider, that the badness of the Age under the greatest helps to Goodness, is so far from being a reasonable discouragement against endeavours of Reformation, that there is great reason to think that God reserves the best Remedies and Assistances against the worst Times,*  
*that*

## TO the READER.

*that when the Malignity of the Contagion is at strongest, it may have a Proportionable Antidote.*

*I am not so vain as to think my self interested in this last Consideration, any farther than as it may serve me with an Answer to an Objection, wherein it is pretended, that Men are the worse for having so much Application made to them for their Recovery, that they suffer in their Morals by being over-tutor'd, as some Men do in their Health by being over-Physick'd : The ground of which Objection proceeds I suppose upon this Observation, that when there are the greatest helps and advantages to goodness, the Age is then always worst. The Observation I confess is too true, but the Consequence that is made from it, may I conceive be taken off, by supposing that this comes to pass by the special Assignment of God's Providence, reserving the best assistances against the worst times, and not by any Natural Connexion that is between the things themselves in order to such a Juncture.*

*Upon these Considerations I am encouraged to send these Discourses abroad, having this only to say concerning them, that as the Subjects of them are of extraordinary importance, so I think they do not fall very much beneath what they undertake for in their several Titles ; that they consist of very weighty and serious  
matter,*



## TO the READER.

*matter, and are indifferently Correct as to their Composition; that they speak both to the Reason and to the Affection of the Reader, and are in good measure fitted both to Convince and to Perswade: In short, that they may be read with a great deal of Profit, and not without some Entertainment. The former is the more considerable end, and 'tis what I mainly aim at; I wish the Reader may do the same, and when both of us concur in so laudable an End, 'tis to be hoped the Blessing of God will not be wanting; and I pray God it may not.*

J. NORRIS.

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A  
DISCOURSE

CONCERNING

*Worldly and Divine Wisdom.*

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V O L. II.

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Luke 16. 8.

*The Children of this World are in their  
Generation Wiser than the Children  
of Light.*

**O**F all the infinite Follies incident to Mankind, there is none that may more justly imploy both our Pity and our Admiration than an Ill-timed, Misplaced and Disproportionate *Wisdom*. The thorough Fool is not nigh so great a Prodigy as the Half-wise Man ; nor is a stark uniform Ignorance so misterious  
and

and unaccountable as an uneven misconducted Prudence. Of this latter we may conceive Two sorts, either a proposal of a wrong End, or an undue prosecution of a right one. In the former, the Man is supposed to be right enough in his *Means*, but to be wrong in his *End*; in the latter, he is supposed to be as right in his *End*, but to be wrong in his *Means*. In the former, we consider the Man as Wise in little things, and a Fool in great concerns; Wise where Wisdom might be spared, and a Fool where 'tis highly necessary. In the latter, we consider him as not *so* Wise in great things, as either himself or another is in little things. And this I take to be a stranger sort of Folly than the former; for here the Man is supposed to be *so* Wise, as to have aim'd at the true Mark, and to have fixed upon a right End, but yet withal at the same time to be *so* much a Fool, as not to prosecute this right End as prudently and carefully as the other does a wrong one; which truly is a very odd Combination. 'Tis a great Folly not to propose a good End, and he that fails in this part, can never expect to have any thing orderly and regular in the whole course of his Life: Such a Man (if he deserve that Name) lives *Backward*, and the longer he lives, and the more active and busie he is, the more he is led out of his way, and the fur-

further he is from his Journey's End. A Man were better have no Mark before him, but Live at *Rovers*, without any End or Design at all, than to propose an End to himself that is not good. The former indeed seems to be more sottish and stupid, and to have less of Soul and Thought in it ; but the latter, if I mistake not, is more dangerous and mischievous, and will lead a Man into more fatal Miscarriages.

But though it be so great a Folly not to propose a good End, yet it seems a much *stranger* Folly not to prosecute it when you have proposed it, and when one has attained so far, not to proceed further : The Reason may be obvious why a Man does not propose a good End, for he may want clearness of Understanding to discern which is so. But he that has proposed aright, shews by his very doing so, that he does not want that. The rightness of his Aim sufficiently argues the goodness of his Eye-sight, and why then he should not prosecute his well-chosen End, is somewhat unaccountable : And besides, the greatness and the goodness of the End, has a natural and genuin efficacy both to *quicken* and to *regulate* the execution of it ; and the more considerable the End is, the more it has of this Influence. As the Means themselves do take their measure from the End, so does the *execution* of them too, and  
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the more weighty and concerning is the End proposed, the more pressing and urging is the engagement that lies upon the Proposer, both to chuse fit and proper Means for the compassing it, and to be diligent in the use and application of them when chosen. So that whether we regard that rational Light and discernment of Mind which he discovers himself to be Master of that proposes a right End, or that aid and assistance which is communicated to him from the weight and moment of the End it self, (which cannot but help on its own prosecution,) the Folly of not prosecuting a well-proposed End, will appear to be of all others the most strange and amazing.

And yet this is that Folly which is more or less chargeable upon the Wifest of Men ; those who have duly considered, and taken a just measure both of themselves and of the World without them ; that have well examined and fitted out the capacities of their Nature, and the utter insufficiency of all created Good to fill those Capacities ; those that have duly prized and valued the whole *Inventory* of this Worlds Goods, and have fixed a general Inscription of *Vanity* upon them all, and who accordingly upon the strength of this Conviction, have gone out of the Circle of this World for their Happiness, and have proposed to themselves the  
supream

supream Good for their End, and for the Wisdom of this their Choice, are stiled *Children of Light* : Even these Men are chargeable with this strange Folly, and it is here actually charged upon them by the eternal and substantial Wisdom of God in this his weighty Remark upon the Politick Stratagem of the unjust Steward, *The Children of this World are in their Generation, wiser than the Children of Light.*

In the Words there is something *implied*, and something directly *asserted*. 'Tis implied,

1. That there are a sort of Men who are Children of this World, that is, who make the Good of this World their End, and seek no further for their Rest and Happiness. 'Tis implied again on the other side,

2. That there are a sort of Men who are Children of Light, who look beyond this Sphere of Vanity, and black Vale of Misery, and propose to themselves the Beatitudes of another Life, as their true and last End ; and these our Lord calls *Children of Light*, both from the *Object* of their Choice, (the Glories of Heaven being frequently represented in Scripture under the Symbol of Light,) and from their *Wisdom* in chusing it. 'Tis implied again,

3. That the former of these notwithstanding the preference here given them, do not  
act

act according to the measures of true Wisdom ; and therefore our Lord does not say *absolutely* that they are Wise, but only that they are Wiser in their *Generation*.

4. The thing directly asserted by our Lord is this, That notwithstanding their want of true Wisdom, (that Wisdom which is from above) they are however wiser in *their Generation* than the Children of Light. That is, that however they are befooled in the Choice of their End, yet they make more prudent Provisions for its Attainment and Security, and prosecute it by more apt and agreeable Means, and with greater Cunning and Diligence than they who have chosen a better, do theirs. And in this the Children of this World, though great Fools, are yet in their Generation, in their Way and Manner, Wiser than the Children of Light.

These I shall make distinct Subjects of Discourse ; to each of which I shall speak according to the present Order.

And first of all, 'tis implied, that there are a sort of Men, who are Children of this World, who make the Good of this World their End, and seek no further for their Rest and Happiness, 'Tis I confess strange that there should be any such, considering that the World is no proper Boundary for the Soul even in its *Natural Capacity*, much less in its *Spiritual* ; 'Tis too cheap and inconsiderable

derable a Good for an Immortal Spirit, much more for a Divine Nature. And therefore did not the Commonness of the thing take off from the Wonder, 'twould seem no doubt as great a Prodigy to see a Man make the World his End, as to see a Stone hang in the Air. For what is it else for a Man, the weight of whose Nature presses hard towards a stable and never failing Center, to stop short in a fluid and yielding Medium, and take up with the slender stays of Vanity, and lean upon the Dream of a Shadow? I say, why is not this to be look'd upon as equally strange and preternatural, as a Stone's hanging in the Air? Is not the Air as proper a Boundary for a *Stone*, as the World is for a *Soul*? And why then is not one as strange as the other? For in the First place, one would think it next to impossible, that a Man who thinks at all, should not consider frequently and thoroughly the vanity and emptiness of all Worldly Good, the shortness and uncertainty of Life, the certainty of Dying, and the uncertainty of the Time when; the Immortality of the Soul, the doubtful and momentous Issues of Eternity, the Terroures of Damnation, and the Glorious things which are spoken, and which cannot be uttered of the City of God. These are Meditations so very obvious, so almost unavoidable, and that so block up a Man's

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way;



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way ; and besides they are so very important and concerning, that for my part I wonder how a Man can think of any thing else. And if a Man does consider and resolve these things, one would think it yet more impossible that he should make so vain a thing as this World, his End ; that he should think of Building Tabernacles of Rest on this side the Grave, and say, *it is good to be here*. So that upon the whole Matter, were a Man put to the Question, whether 'twere possible that a Rational and Thinking Creature as Man is, should be so far a Child of this World, as to make the Good of it his End, and seek no further for Rest and Happiness ; were a Man I say to consider this only in Notion and Theory, without having any recourse to Observation and Experience, he would go nigh to resolve the Question in the Negative, and think it impossible that he who is capable of Chusing at all, should Chuse so ill.

But, whether 'tis that Men do not heartily believe such a thing as a future state of Happiness and Misery ; or if they do, that they do not actually and seriously consider it, but suffer it to lye dormant and unactive within them, and so are as little affected with it, as if they did not believe it ; or that they look upon it through that End of the *Perspective* which represents it as a great way off, and so are more vigorously drawn by  
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the Nearer, though Lesser Loadstone; or whatever other cause may be assigned for it, we are too well assured from Experience, that there are such Men in the World: Men, who going through the Vale of Misery, use it not only as a Well to refresh and allay, but fully to quench and satisfy their Thirst; *Psal.* 84. 6. τὸ ἐμύλια φρονεῖντες, as the Apostle Phrases it, *who mind and relish Earthly things*, *Phil.* 3. 19. who make the Good of this World their last Aim, the Sum total of their Wishes, the upshot of their Desires and Expectations, their End: Who love it as they are Commanded to love God, with all their Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength, who rest and lean upon the World with the whole stress and full weight of their Being, who out-do the Curse of the Serpent, and whose very Soul cleaves to the Dust. //

For I demand, Is not the Interest of this Animal Life, the great Governing Principle of the World? Are not the Policies of the Statesman, and the little Under-crafts of the Plebeian, all put into Motion by this Spring, and all guided and determined by this Measure? Is not every thing almost reckoned Profitable only so far as it conduces to some Temporal Interest, insomuch, that the very Name *Interest*, is almost appropriated to Worldly Advantage? And is not this the great Bias of Mankind? Is not most of the

Noise and Bustle that is in the World, about the World it self, who shall have the greatest Share of it, and make the greatest Figure in it? Do we not see Men all set and intent upon the World, that lay themselves out wholly upon it, and that can relish nothing but what has relation to it? Men that seem to grow into the Soil where they dwell, and to have their Heads and Hearts fastened to the Ground with as many Cords and Fibres, as the Root of a Tree; and that seem to be staked down and nailed fast to the Earth, and that can no more be moved from it, than the Earth it self can from its Center: In one Word, Men of whom it may be said without Censure, that the World is their God, and its Pleasures, Honours, and Profit their *Trinity*.

Nor is this matter of *Practice* only, but of *Opinion* too; for we know there have been some among the Antient Philosophers, who have expressly taught, that the End of Man, the *Totum Hominis*, lies in the Good of the Animal Life, in the Pleasure of the grosser Senses. Thus we know did *Aristippus*, *Cyrenaeus*, and a whole Sect of Philosophers after him, called *Cyrenaici*; which Opinion is also charged upon *Epicurus* by *Cicero*, and by many of the Fathers of the Church: And the Charge is still believed and entertained among many Persons of sufficient Learning and

and Worth, notwithstanding the favourable and plausible Plea *Monsieur Gassendi* has offered in the behalf of his Master. But the best Plea is, that these are Pardonable in comparison of those who enjoy the Advantages of a Revealed Religion, and that in its last Perfection and Consummation too, and yet take no higher Aim than at the Good of this World, and in direct Contradiction to our Saviours Aphorism, think that the *Life*, that is, the true Interest and Happiness of Man *does* consist in the Abundance of things which he possesses, *Luke 12. 15.*

To our Experience, we may add the Attestations of Scripture, which gives several intimations of this low-sunk, wretched and deplorable Degeneracy of Soul. To instance in a few, does not *Job* say in vindication of his Integrity, *If I have made Gold my Hope, or have said to the Fine Gold, thou art my Confidence?* *Job 31. 24.* Implying that some there were that did so. And does not the *Psalmist* say, *Psal. 52. 8. Lo, this is the Man that took not God for his Strength, but trusted in the multitude of his Riches, and strengthened himself in his Wickedness?* And does not the Apostle tell us of some *whose God is their Belly*, *Phil. 3. 19.* and of others, *whose Godliness is their Gain?* *1 Tim. 6. 5.* And what else does the Apostle mean, when he says of *Covetousness*, that it is *Idolatry*? Does he not

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thereby



thereby intimate, that the Covetous Wretch not only delights in his Possessions, and loves to count over his Heaps, (for this a Man may do without being an Idolater,) but that he places his End and chief Happiness in his Treasures, that he falls down and adores his Golden Calf; and in the forementioned Phrase of *Job*, makes Gold his *Hope*, and says to the Fine Gold, thou art my *Confidence*!

But the Minds of Men (thanks be to God) are not all under this Eclypse, nor is this Darkness spread over the whole Face of the Deep; Light and Darkness divide the Moral as well as the Natural World, though with the difference of unequal Proportions; the Darker is here the bigger side. There are however, though not so many, yet there are Secondly, a sort of Men who are Children of Light, whose Minds are more Illuminated, and their Eye more clear and single, who look beyond the Veil of the Material World, the Beauty of which can neither charm, nor its Thickness detain their piercing Sight, and propose to themselves the Beatitudes of another Life as their true and last End. This many do in *Profession*, and some in *Reality*: In Profession all Christians do it, to whom therefore the Title of Children of Light is promiscuously given by the Apostle, *1 Thes. 5. 5. Ye are all the Children*  
of

of *Light*, and the *Children of the Day*; *We are not of the Night, nor of Darknes*: That is as far as concerns Profession and Solemn Undertaking. But that which all Christians profess, some do really do, proposing to themselves *Habitually* at least, the Happiness of the *other* World as their last End, being by repeated Experiences, as well as rational Reflections upon the Nature of things, abundantly convinced of the vanity of *this*. And these indeed aim at the right Mark, though all of them have not a Hand steady enough to hit it.

But to return again to the Children of this World, 'tis implied in the Third Place, that these do not act according to the Measures of true Wisdom; for our Lord does not say absolutely that they are Wise, but only that they are Wiser in their Generation; which implies, that absolutely speaking, and upon the whole, they are not Wise. Indeed they think themselves Wise, and the World for the most part is of their Opinion: They are generally esteemed not only Wise, but the only Wise Men, Men of Reach and Design, Policy and Conduct; and he that does not play his Game, so as to thrive in the World, is generally pitied more for his *Folly*, than for his *Poverty*. Nay hence, and hence only, are taken the Measures of Wisdom and Prudence, and this is made the

Rule and Standard of all Policy and Discretion ; a Man is counted so far Wise, and no farther, than he knows how to get an Estate, to raise a Family, to give Birth to a Name, and make himself great and considerable in the World : He that can do this, is a Shrewd Man, and he that can't, is either Pitied or Laugh'd at (according to the Humour the World's in) by those that can.

Neither is it any Allay or Abatement of their Character, to say that all this is brought about by Sinister and Indirect Means, by Fraud and Couzenage, by Deceit and Corrupt Proceedings : This rather Commends the Parts and Ingenuity of the Man, shews him to be a Man of Art and Contrivance, and that he owes his Success more to good Management, than good Fortune ; nay, he that can do thus, is the Topping Wise Man, and is thought worthy not only to *have*, but so far to *ingross* the Name, that a Shrewd Cunning Man (even in their own Language) is but another Word for a *Knave*. This is the general Sense of the World.

But whatever the Opinion of Men may be, we are assured by the Apostle who had Conversed in the other World as well as in this, that *the Wisdom of this World is Foolishness with God* ; 1 Cor. 3. 19. and if so, to be sure 'tis Foolishness in it self, since the Intellect of God is the Measure of all Truth. And the  
*Psalmist*

*Psalmist* speaking of Worldly-Minded Men, that think their Houses shall continue for ever, and call their Lands after their own Names, says expressly, *Psal. 49. 13. This is their Foolishness.* And this Censure he boldly charges upon them, how singular soever it might seem; and though not only the present Generation of Men should vote them Wise, but even their Posterity; those of more Improved Reasonings, and more Inlarged Experience, should *praise their Saying.*

Thus light do these Men weigh in the Balance of the *Sanctuary*; nor will they be found to be less wanting in that of *Reason*: For how can they deserve the Title of Wise Men, who are out in the very first and leading part of Wisdom, the Chusing of a Right End? This is such a mighty Flaw, as nothing that comes after, can make up or Compensate for. When once a Man has fixed himself a wrong End, he has cut out a *false Chanel* for the whole Course of his Life, which must needs be ever after one continued Mistake, one constant Blunder; and though he be never so Ingenious afterward, to compass this End, his Wisdom comes too late, and does but serve to insure and hasten his Ruin. The Ship indeed has good Sails, there is nothing wanting in the *Executive* part; but steering to a wrong Point, it has this only advantage  
from



from them, to be dashed upon the Rock with the greater Speed and Violence.

The short is, no Man is, or ought to be accounted Wise for that wherein he is Mistaken; and that this is the case of those who propose to themselves false Ends is most certain: For no Man proposes any End but what he takes to be *Good*, and fit to be Prosecuted, Evil as Evil being not within the Possibilities of Choice, whether as to the *End* or as to the *Means*. If therefore the End prove really Evil (which is here supposed to be the Case,) 'tis otherwise than what he thought it, and consequently he was abused and imposed upon in his Choice. And now let him play his *After-game* never so well, and pursue this his false End by never so apt and compendious Methods, the most he can pretend to, is to drive well in a false Road, and the most he can justly expect is to be thought a *Cunning*, but he must never set up for a *Wise* Man. He may indeed pass for such an one among the *Many*, as an Ill Acted Part is commonly the most Applauded by the injudicious Rabble of the Theater. But this Wisdom is now Foolishness with *God*, the only exact and unerring Judge, and will one day be made appear so to *Angels* and *Men*. Then also shall the Children of this World, who have been so often admired and cryed up for their extraordinary Depth and Reach, and been

been reckon'd the Sharpest Intreaguers and Projectors, the very *Machiavels* of their Age, confess and lament their own great Folly and Weakness, (when yet 'tis too late to be Wise,) and admire the *Wisdom* as well as the *strange Salvation* of those whose Life they once thought Madness.

And thus I have done with the Three things implied in the Text ; I now proceed in the Fourth place, to the thing directly Asserted : Which is, that notwithstanding the want of true Wisdom in the Children of this World, they are however Wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light. Or in other Words, that however they are befool'd in the Choice of their End, yet they make more prudent Provisions for its Attainment and Security, and Prosecute it by more agreeable Means, and with more Cunning and Diligence, than they who have Chosen a Better, do theirs. They are indeed worse *Proposers*, but they are better *Executors*, worse *Designers*, but better *Contrivers*. They come vastly short indeed of the Children of Light in the first part of Wisdom, the Choice of a right End, in which respect the Child of Light has as much the Precedency in point of Wisdom, as Heaven is better than Earth ; but then they exceed them as much in the Second, the Choice and Application of right Means.

Now

Now this I shall make appear Two ways; First, Antecedently, by considering what Grounds of probability there are that it should be so. Secondly, *a posteriori*, by Comparing the Proceedings of each of these Men, whereby it will appear that it is so.

And First, there are Grounds of probability and Presumption that it should be so: For it may be considered in the First place, that the Children of this World having chosen the Good of the Animal Life for their End, must be supposed to set the same value upon it, and to look upon it with the same Eye that the Children of Light do upon Glory and Happiness; And this notwithstanding all its real Vanity and Emptiness: For did they see and perceive that, they would never have chosen it for their End; and if they do not, then 'tis all one to them, as if it were a Solid and Substantial Good, and they prize it accordingly. Thus far therefore they both stand upon equal Ground.

But then Secondly, 'Tis to be considered, that although these two Ends considered Absolutely and Simply in themselves, are alike valued by their respective Proponents, (for then is a thing at the *highest* value, when 'tis made an End,) yet one of the Scales may and will receive some moments of Advantage more than the other, from some Accidental and Collateral Circumstances, which  
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may more sensibly indear one of these Ends, and give it a more Commanding Influence over the Soul that proposes it : Which indeed is the present Case.

For 1<sup>st</sup>, The good things of this World are *Present*, those of the other *Remote* and *Distant* : How far distant, we don't know, and are therefore apt to fancy the farthest remove ; like Travellers, that think the Way always longest, where they are the greatest Strangers. Now we know a present Good has a great Advantage above a far distant and late Reversion. A Candle that is near, affects us more than the Sun a great way off, and by its Neighbourhood, out does the others Bigness. And as 'tis in distance of *Place*, so it is in distance of *Time* ; a present Good though it be less, is more affecting and inviting, than one of a more Sizeable Dimension, if it be Future ; and there is more Force and Vertue in one single *Now*, than in many *Hereafters*. 'Tis not in the Moral as in *Physical Statics* ; there indeed that Weight weighs heaviest, which is furthest removed from the Center of Motion ; but here the nearer the Weight, the stronger is its Power : And there is this convincing Reason for it, the Good that is Present, opens its self all at once to the Soul, and acts upon it with its full and intire Force ; there is not so much as a Ray of its Light but what strikes



strikes us. But now that which is future, is seen by Parts and in Succession, and a great deal of it is not seen at all; like the Rays of a too distant Object which are too much dispersed before they come at us, and so most of them miss the Eye. This makes the least present Interest, out-weigh a very considerable *Reversion*, since the former strikes upon us with the strong Influence and Warmth of the Neighbouring Sun, the latter with the Faint and Cold Glimmerings of a Twinkling Star. And accordingly the Holy Ghost takes notice of it, as an extraordinary thing in *Moses*, and that argued him to be a Person of great Presence and Discernment of Mind, that he could so rightly Calculate his Interest, as to prefer the Future Rewards of Heaven, before the Present Glories of *Egypt*.

Then 2<sup>dly</sup>, The Good Things of this World are not only Present and at hand, but *Sure* and *Certain*; I mean as to us, for the other are no less so in themselves. *We are sure* (as *Job* says) *that there is a Vein for the Silver, and a Place for Gold where they find it*, *Job* 28. Our Senses inform us of this, and that's a Testimony we seldom reject. As for the place of Happiness, we have heard the Fame thereof indeed with our Ears, but have neither seen it our selves, nor discoursed with those that have; and although 'tis assured

assured to us with as much Evidence as is consistent with the Nature and Vertue of *Faith*, nay, with almost as much as a thing Future is capable of; yet *Darkness* and *Fear* commonly go together, and Men are generally very jealous and distrustful about things whereof they are Ignorant, or half Inform'd, as Imperfect Eyes are apt to start. And though the Principles of *Faith* are in themselves as Firm and Firmer than those of *Science*, yet to us 'tis not so Evident; nor do we ever assent so strongly to what we Believe (be the Testimony never so Authentick,) as we do to what we know.

Then 3dly, The Good Things of this World, as they are Present and Sure, so do they strike upon the most *Tender* and *Impressible* part about us, our Senses. They attempt us, as the Devil did *Adam*, in our Weaker part, through the *Eve* of our Natures. A Sensible Representation is the strongest of all Representations; a Sensible Representation, even of the *Vanity* of the World, would work more with us, than the Discourse of an Angel about it; and I question not, but that *Alexander* the Great was more inwardly affected when he saw the Ruins of the Grave of *Cyrus*, when he saw so great Power reduced to such narrow Limits, such Majesty seated on such a Throne; the *Monarch* of *Asia* Hid, or rather Lost in an Ob-  
scure

scure Cave, a Stone for his Bed, Cobwebs for his Tapestry, and all his Pomp and Glory turned into Night and Darknes ; I say, he was more convinced of the Vanity of Greatness by this lively Appeal to his Senses, than he ever was or could be by all the grave Lectures of his Master *Aristotle*. And if the *Vanity* of the World when represented to the Senses, has such vigorous Effects upon them, what shall we think of the *Glory* of it when so Represented ? How would that Affect and Subdue us !

And this the Devil very well knew and considered, when he was to Tempt the Son of God ; his design was to decoy him into Covetousness and Ambition, and in order to this, he might have entertained him with fine Discourses about the Wealth and Glories of the Terrestrial Globe, and have read him a *Geographical Lecture* upon the Kingdoms and Empires of it ; but he knew his Advantage better than so, and chose rather to draw a *Visionary Landskip* before him, and present him with a Sensible Idea of all this, knowing by old Experience how much more apt the Senses are to take Impression, than any other Faculty of Man.

Now this is the great advantage that the Good Things of this World have, they are obvious to our Senses, we *See* them, we *Hear* them, we *Smell* them, we *Tast* them, we *Feel* and

and *Handle* them, and have the most intimate and indearing Conversation with them; *The things that are Temporal are seen*, 2 Cor. 4. 18. says the Apostle: 'Tis their distinguishing Character. But the things that are Eternal are not seen, but only through a Glass darkly, so seen as not to be discerned; and in reference to the other World, as the same Apostle says, *We walk by Faith and not by Sight*, 2 Cor. 5. 7.

From these and other such Collateral Advantages which the things of this World have above those of the next, it may in the First place be presumed, that those who have erred so far as to make this their End, are in all probability like to Love it more Intensely, and value it more highly than the Children of Light do their Ends, which wants these Sensible Indearments and Recommendations. Well, and if so, then it further follows, that of necessity they must be more heartily concerned for its Attainment, and consequently more Wary in the *Choice*, and more Diligent in the *Use* of such Means as serve to that purpose. For the Love of the Means always receives its Measure from that of the End.

And thus we see what grounds of probability there are, that it should be so. I come now in the Second Place, briefly to compare the Proceedings of each of these Men,

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whereby it will appear, that *de facto* it is so.

And here First, we find by Experience, that the Men of this World do *prefer* their Secular Interest above all other things whatsoever ; and that not only in Notion and Theory, Habitually and in General, (for that's supposed in its being made their End,) but also in every instant of Action, in all Junctures and Circumstances. Though their *End* be False, yet *they* are not so, but keep true to it, and always prefer it, retaining in every point of Action the very same Sense and Judgment they had of it when they first made it their Choice. And to satisfy that they are in good earnest, they will adhere to it at any rate, they will forfeit any Good, and undergo any Evil to secure this their grand Stake. For will they not Rise Early, and Late take Rest, Drudge and Toil, Plot and Contrive, Cheat and Defraud, Lye and Dissemble, be of any Religion, or of no Religion, and submit to all the Basenesses imaginable, to Get or Secure, or Recover a Place of Honour or Profit ? Will they not incur the Curses of the Widow and Orphan, the Contempt of Wise Men, the Hatred of Mankind, the Censures of Posterity, the Displeasure of God, and even Damnation itself for the sake of their beloved Mammon ? They will ; they will bustle through all this, and will gain their Point, though they lose every

every thing besides : And herein they are consistent with themselves, they act agreeably to their Principles.

But now will the Children of Light do much for their End ? Will these part with the World for Heaven, as the other will part with Heaven for the World ? Will these do or suffer any thing for the Interest of their *Souls*, as the other will for that of their *Bodies* ? Some few there are that will, and God add to their Number. But are there not many who *Habitually* and in General, have proposed to themselves Heaven for their End, and so far are supposed to give it the Preference above all ; and yet when they come to be set upon by a Temptation, to have before them the Charms of Pleasure, or the Terrors of Pain, or to be pressed with either Hopes of Gain, or Fear of Loss ; in short, when they come to have any other considerable Interest brought into Competition with that which they made their End, will they not then suffer a present Interruption of their former Judgment, and actually undervalue what they *Habitually* prefer ? Will they not enter into a Cloud of Darkness and Obscurity, lose the present Light of their former Convictions, and so act as Foolishly as those that never had any better Principles, or truer Sentiments ? Will they not prove False to their Cause and to themselves,

make a Foolish Exchange, let go the Substance, and catch at the Shadow? Will they not refuse to take up the Crown for fear of the Thorns that guard it, and chuse rather to lose Heaven than be Translated thither in a Fiery Chariot? Yes, 'tis to be feared that most of them will; and that of those many that have proposed Heaven as their End, there are but few that would have the Courage to be *Martyrs* for it.

Again Secondly, The Children of this World as they will spare no *Pains*, so will they lose no *Time* or *Opportunity* for the Securing a Temporal Interest. They greedily Seize upon the next Minute, take Opportunity by the *Forelock*, and make haste to be Rich, though by doing so, they know they shall not be Innocent. They carefully observe every Season, lay hold upon the First that comes, and will be sure to strike Sail with the very next Wind that will carry them to their Port. They know very well, that the present time is the only time they are Masters of, and that they may reckon upon as their own, and therefore *that* they will be sure to Improve, and not trust to the Uncertainties and Contingencies of Futurity. Let but a Question arise about their Title to their Estate, and they can't sleep till it be clear'd up and confirm'd. Let but a Place of Dignity or Profit fall, and with what

what Expedition do these Eagles repair to the Carcass! They take the Wings of the *Morning*, perhaps of the *Night* too, and fly as if running for a Prize, or chased by an Enemy.

But now, are the Children of Light such Prizers of Time, and such Improvers of Opportunity? 'Twere well if they were. For what is more common than to see Men, not only the professedly wicked and profligate, but even those who have set their Faces *Sionward*, and propose Heaven as their End, to procrastinate and adjourn their Repentance from Day to Day, from Month to Month, from Year to Year, to delay their Preparations for Eternity, and to Sleep soundly and securely, in a *Doubtful*, and sometimes in a *Damnable* and Irreconciled State; and all this, though they know how short and uncertain their Lives are, that 'tis but a *Breath* and a *Vapor* that soon passes away, and we are gone. Though they know that there is but this one time of Probation, and that *there is no Work, nor Device, nor Knowledge, nor Wisdom in the Grave*, Eccl. 9. 10. Though they know that *Now is the Accepted Time, that Now is the Day of Salvation*, 2 Cor. 6. 2.

Again Thirdly, the Children of this World, as they will lose no Time, so neither will they let slip any other Advantage of advancing their Fortunes, and of providing



against a Wet Day. They twist their own Interest with the Interest of their Friends, seek out for *all* Helps, and make use of the *Best*, and take the advantage of every Rising Ground. They have also a quick Eye upon all Revolutions, suppose themselves in all possible Cases, and make early Preparations for every Accident. They sit like Wary and Watchful Spiders in the Heart of their Webs, and there with a quick and perceptive Sense, they feel out the least Disturbances that threaten the Security of their little Tenement. Nor do they smell out Danger more suddenly than they provide against it. Thus the unjust Steward; when he foresaw he should quit his *Office*, and in that his *Livelihood*, and be turned loose to the wide World, he presently bethought him of a Plank to Swim upon, made an Interest with his Lords Debtors, by under-rating their Accounts, that so when his *Master* should Discard him, *they* in Requital of his Kindness, might Receive and Harbour him.

But now are the Children of Light so careful to make use of all Helps and Means that may further them in the Attainment of their Great End? Such as the Grace of God, Happiness of Temper and Complexion, Good Education, Well-disposed Circumstances of Life, the Good Examples of others, Advice of Spiritual Persons, and the like. Besides,  
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are they also so Frugal and Provident, so Forecasting and Contriving for the future? Are they so careful in the day of Grace to lay up in Store against a Spiritual Famine, in the days of Peace to Store themselves with Spiritual Armour against the time of Persecution, in the time of Life and Health to provide against the Hour of Sickness and Death, and by a Wise Dispensation of the fading and unrighteous Mammon, to procure to themselves everlasting Habitations? Are they? Every ones Experience and Observation may assure him that they are not.

Once more, the Children of this World, as they Catch at all Advantages that may further their Grand Affair, so are they withal as careful to avoid all *Occasions* of Loss and Damage; they love to tread upon firm Ground, shun Hazards as well as actual Misfortunes, and won't so much as come within the *Smell* of Danger. How Shy is the Man of Interest, of lighting among such Company as he thinks will be apt to borrow Money of him, draw him into Suretyship, or betray him into any Expences! Does he not fly from these as from the Snares of Death, or from the Face of a Serpent?

But do the Children of Light take the same Care to avoid all Appearances of Evil, all Spiritual Dangers, and all Occasions and Temptations of Sinning against God and their own Happiness? We Pray indeed, and

our Saviour has taught us to do so, that God would not lead us into Temptation? But don't we often lead our Selves into as Bad as the Worst of those we can Pray against? We venture oftentimes causelessly and rashly within reach of the Devil's Chain, and are not afraid to stir up and awake that Roaring Lyon: We love to play with Danger, to handle Knives and Razors, to walk upon Slippery Ground, to stand upon Turrets and Battlements, and to hazard our Vertue and Innocence, by *Needless*, and sometimes *Doubtful* Trials, where if we should Overcome, the Victory would scarce atone for the Imprudence. So much do the Children of this World exceed the Children of Light in Wisdom.

Thus it is, and to our great shame we must Confess it: There is no Doubt or Dispute in the Victory, the Contention has been all along very unequal, and the Odds very apparent; we are utterly *Distanc'd* in the Race, and see the Prize of Wisdom born away before us. We have indeed in our Eye a much Nobler Mark, but we want a steady Hand. Our End is better than theirs, but our Management is not so good. And what a shame is it for us that have proposed a Greater and a better End, and are also more Instructed in the Choice of Means, (which are pointed out and described to us by God himself,) to be yet so far out-witted  
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by those of Lower Aims, and who are fain to Study and Contrive their own Means, and whose Wisdom after all, is Foolishness with God! And yet thus it is, the Devil's Scholars are better Proficients than Christ's Disciples; the Ark falls before *Dagon*, and Light is outshone by Darkness.

What therefore remains, but that since we will not Learn in *Christ's*, we should be sent to the *Devil's* School, and imitate the Politicks of the Dark Kingdom, and of the Children of this World? Imitate them I say, not in the Choice of the *End*, (which indeed is very Poor and Low,) but in that *Wisdom*, Diligence and Care wherewith they prosecute it, and be as Wise at least unto *Salvation*, as they are to *Destruction*. Go to the *Ant* thou *Sluggard*, says *Solomon*, consider her Ways, and be Wise, Prov. 6. 6. And may I not in like manner bespeak the greatest part even of Piously disposed Christians, Go to the Men of the World, and learn Wisdom?

Let us then be as Wise as these Serpents; and since we have Chosen the *Better Part*, and are so nigh to the Kingdom of God, let us not for the want of *One* thing, miss of being compleatly Wise and Happy. But as we have made a good Choice, let us prosecute it with equal Prudence. So will our Wisdom be Whole and Intire, Uniform and Consistent, Blameless and Irreprehensible;  
in



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in a Word, that Wisdom which shall be  
*Justified of all her Children.*

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## A Discourse concerning Righteous and Unrighteous Judgment.

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Joh. 7. 24. *Judge not according to the Appearance, but Judge Righteous Judgment.*

**T**HAT which the great *Descartes* makes necessary to a *Philosopher*, is indeed no less so to a *Christian*; to strip and devest himself of all Prejudices and Partialities, to unravel all his former Sentiments, to unthink all his Pre-conceived Opinions, and so reduce his Soul to the natural Simplicity of a *Blank Table*, and to the Indifferency of an even and well poised Ballance. For as it matters much in reference to our Actions, what our Sentiments and Judgments of things are (because we always act as at that present instant we think,) so does it to the Regularity and Uprightness of our Judgments what the Temper and Disposition of  
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our Mind is: The Wise *Ben-Sirach* has long since observed, that *Wisdom will not enter into a Polluted Spirit*; and *St. Paul*, that the *Animal Man perceives not the things of God*, 1 Cor. 2. 14. There are it seems some *Moral* as well as *Natural* Dispositions of the Man that make the Soul unfit for Knowledge, and till these Scales fall off from her Eyes, she cannot see. But the *Pythagoreans* went higher, and taught their Disciples, *χρεισμένων ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος πρὸς τὴν ἁλῶς φιλοσοφεῖν*, that they must separate and unwind themselves even from their very Bodies, if they would be good Philosophers. This in a Qualified and Corrected Sence is true, for the Body is the great Impediment and Disadvantage of the Soul, and therefore all Bodily Passions and Inclinations, as well as Intellectual Habits and Appetites must be put to *Silence*, in the still and Attentive Search and Inquiry after Truth. But to the present purpose, it will be enough to remark, that Prejudices and Prepossessions as well as vitious Habits, a cross Constitution, and a gross Texture of Blood and Spirits, do Cloud and Pervert the Understanding, and take away the *Key of Knowledge*. This is that *Veil* which (as the Apostle complains,) 2 Cor. 3. 4. remain'd untaken away upon the *Jews*, in the Reading of the Old Testament. And which hindered them from understanding it,  
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and made them stand out in defiance against all the Divine Precepts and Convincing Works of the Son of God, whose Divinity through this Veil of Prejudice they could not discern. It was a greater hindrance to them in distinguishing the Character of his Person, than the Veil of his own Flesh was, or the Mystery of the *Incarnation*. This therefore must be removed by the Christian as well as by the Philosopher, and the Soul must be Purged before it can be enlightened ; Freed from Prejudices and false Appearances before it can be from Errors and Misapprehensions. Without this Purity of *Heart*, there will be so little Clearness of *Head*, that let our Parts stand upon never so great Advantages, either of Art or of Nature, we shall neither be right in our Determinations of things, nor just in our Censure of Persons ; neither Wise in our Discourses, nor Righteous in our Sentences ; we shall neither maintain *Truth* nor *Charity*. All which is briefly Intimated and summarily Contained in this Admonition of our Saviour to the prejudiced and partially affected *Jews*, *Judge not according to the Appearance, but Judge Righteous Judgment.*

In Discoursing upon which Words, I shall First of all Inquire, what it is in general to Judge according to Appearance ?

Secondly, Whether all Judging according to Appearance, be opposed to Judging Righteous

teous Judgment, and consequently here forbidden?

Thirdly, If all be not, which it is that is so?

Lastly, I shall shew the great Reasonableness and Necessity of the Precept, and Conclude.

I begin with the first Inquiry, what it is in general to Judge according to *Appearance*. Now this will be best known, by considering the import of the Terms severally. By *Judging* therefore, is properly understood that action of the Mind which either joins the Attribute with the Subject, or separates it from it. Or to speak less Artificially, and more to Common Apprehension, which either affirms or denies one thing of another. By *Appearance*, I understand the Representation of the Object to the Mind, with its Motives and Arguments, true or false, in order either to assent or dissent. So that to Judge according to Appearance, is in other Words to affirm or deny one thing of another, upon the representation of certain Arguments or Motives, to *Believe*, *Think*, or to be *Assured* that a thing is so or so, upon such and such Grounds; and so it takes in the Three-fold kind of Assent, and that in all the variety of Degree, *Faith*, *Opinion*, and *Science*, with this only difference between them, that whereas Faith and Opinion do  
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not necessarily suppose a firm Foundation, but are indifferent to due and undue Appearances, (for a Man may believe and think upon false as well as upon good Grounds.) Science does always suppose a due and regular Appearance of the Object, and cannot proceed but upon sufficient Grounds.

And this I think sufficient in Answer to the First Question ; I proceed therefore to inquire Secondly, whether all Judging according to Appearance, be opposed to judging Righteous Judgment, and consequently here forbidden. But we need not inquire long about it, for 'tis most certain that all is not ; for if it were, there could than be no such thing as that *Righteous Judgment* which our Saviour *Commands*, and therefore *Supposes*. Nay, there could be no such thing as Judging at all, because all manner of Judgment is grounded upon the Appearance of things, and without some motive of Persuasion, some shew of Truth, no Man can in any degree be Perswaded. For the Understanding can no more be determined without an Appearance of *Truth*, than the Will can without an Appearance of *Good* : And consequently 'tis as absurd, that all *Judging* according to Appearance should be Criminal, as that all *Willing* according to Appearance should be so. For then indeed all manner of Judgment would be Unrighteous, and

a Man could not use his Intellectual Faculty, but he must Sin ; which would introduce a new and unheard of *Scepticism* into the World, and oblige Men to suspend the Exercise of their Intellectual Powers, not because there is no Truth, but because 'tis not lawful to Embrace her.

Since therefore, all Judging according to Appearance, is not opposed to Righteous Judgment, nor consequently here forbidden, it concerns us to inquire in the Third place, which it is that is so.

And First, to Judge Ill of a Man upon clear and full Evidence, is not that Judging according to Appearance, which is here Forbidden, as opposed to Righteous Judgment : Nay, this is the most Righteous Judgment that can be, for this is the due use of our Judging Faculty, in the right Exercise whereof, 'tis impossible there should be any Mis-carriage. I do not make a meer Judging Rightly, or according to what is *True*, to be a due use of our Understandings ; for though a Man give his Judgment according to Truth, yet if he be determined to such an Assent by incompetent Motives, he does not use his Understanding aright ; but if it be in a Matter of bare Speculation, is guilty of *Levity* and *Rashness* ; if in a thing wherein his Brothers Reputation is concerned, of *Uncharity* and *Censoriousness*. But if my Judgment of another

ther be never so Ill, provided the Evidence be Full and Clear, I make a right use of my Judging Faculty, nor can my Judgment be taxed as Unrighteous. And upon this Principle relies all the Innocence and Equity of Courts of Justice, the severest of whose *Verdicts* are Justified by the Sufficiency of the *Evidence*.

And there is the same common Reason and Measure for the more private Court of *Conscience*, that there is for the more Publick ones, and that which warrants the Proceedings of either, will justify both; so that if it be lawful for a Jury to bring in a Verdict of the highest Guilt against a Man upon clear Evidence, any Private Person may also upon the like Grounds pass the like Ill Judgment concerning any Man within his own Breast, and in his Thoughts pronounce him a Criminal, if he has good Evidence for such a Judgment. Thus if I see a Man live in a constant course of Vice, in open Defiance to all Laws both Human and Divine, to Wallow in all manner of Bestiality, and Drink down Iniquity with Greediness, I may safely and innocently pronounce him an Ill Man. First, because 'tis not in a Man's Power to suspend such a Judgment, any more than 'tis to resist a Demonstration in *Mathematics*. The Truth thrusts her self upon me, and I cannot put her back, she will be imbraced

embraced and I cannot refuse her ; I may wink against the *Sun*, but I cannot shut my Eyes against *Manifest Truth* : And to pretend *Charity* here, is ridiculous ; for however Charity may oblige me to Believe and Hope the Best, where there is any room for a favourable Construction, yet certainly it does not oblige me to put out my Eyes, and reject all the information of my Senses : Neither is it possible for me to do so. But suppose I *could* resist such a Judgment, yet I *need* not, because Secondly, in such a Case, there is no wrong done to the Party whom my Censure concerns : He is represented in a faithful Glass, censured after his due Character, and called by his proper Name, and therefore cannot complain of an Injury, without committing one. *Acts 13. 10. O full of all Subtilty and all Mischief, thou Child of the Devil, thou Enemy of all Righteousness*, said St. Paul to *Elymas* the Sorcerer, when he saw him endeavouring to turn away the Deputy from the Christian Faith. And *have not I chosen Twelve, and one of you is a Devil*, said our Blessed Saviour. Both these Charges went very high, but the Evidence of the Guilt bore Proportion to them, and that was their Justification. 'Tis therefore very Warrantable to pass a severe Judgment upon a Man, when 'tis plain and out of all question that he deserves it. Nay, 'tis not only Warrantable,

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but in several respects of great Use and Necessity ; for by this Means I am instructed to enlarge my Litany, both for his Conversion, and for my own Deliverance, to apply Reproofs and Advices with all other Methods of Reformation, to beware of his Contagion my self, and in great Measure to prevent its diffusion among others. Whereas if we suffer our Eyes to be so far blinded by a pretended Charity, as not to see the Devil under his Monastick Disguise, he has what he could wish, and what Ill Men use to wish ;

*Noctem Peccatis, & Fraudibus objice Nubem.*

to be Skreen'd about with the Shades of Night, and to Sin in a Cloud, and will do the more Mischief for not being better Understood, and destroy like *the Pestilence that walketh in Darkness*, Psal. 91. 6.

But Secondly, to judge Ill of a Man upon such a Concurrence of shrewd Circumstances as makes up what we call a *Moral Demonstration*, is not that Judging according to Appearance, which is here Condemned. This is also so frequently rely'd upon in Courts of Justice, where Sentence of Death is often given upon such Evidence ; nay the greatest part of Human Affairs is known to turn upon this Hinge, and indeed not without good Reason. For although this be an inferior degree of Evidence, and such as leaves an Absolute

solute Possibility that the thing may be otherwise, yet it secures a Man from all *Fear* of the Contrary; and a Traveller may as little doubt of his way when lightned by the numerous Union of little Splendors in the Milky Way, as when he has the Broad Eye of Heaven for his Guide. For though every single Circumstance in this great heap of Inducements, has but the force of a Probability, and consequently all together can produce no more than that by a proper and direct efficacy; yet there is a new and secondary Force that arises from Reflection; and the *Confederate* Probabilities, weigh more in their Conjunction, than not only some, but even all of them would do *Singly*. Indeed they fall little short of a strict Demonstration, it being hardly conceivable how there should be such a conflux of Arguments upon one side of the Contradiction if the Truth were not there too.

And moreover there is one Advantage that a Moral Demonstration has above a Physical one, namely, that there can be no contrary Demonstration brought against it. 'Tis otherwise in the latter; as for Instance, in that endless and unbounded Controversy concerning the Composition of a *Continuum* and the infinite Divisibility of Quantity, where there are plain Demonstrations (that is, such as by Men of Art and Subtilty can-

not be discern'd from such,) on both sides, which yet are Contradictory. But now, this a Moral Demonstration does not admit of, since it cannot lay claim to that Name, till after the Probabilities of both sides have been Compared, and one Scale mightily outweighs the other. Whenever therefore there is this Evidence for any Mans Wickedness,

\* See a short, but very convincing Account of this matter in Dr. Burnet's *Latin Theory*; the *Second Part*. Pag. 126.

I may safely censure him as Guilty. \* Thus, that the See of Rome is the Seat of Antichrist, though this be not evident up to the degree of Physical Demonstration, yet

when I consider what the Notes and Marks of Antichrist are, how various in their Number, how considerable in their Quality, and how exactly they all agree to a certain Order of Men in the World, and to none besides, together with all the variety of Concurrence in point of *Synchronisms* and the like; I suppose I might without any danger of Cenforiousness or Uncharity, write *Mystery* upon the Triple Crown, and conclude him that wears it to be *the Man of Sin*. This would not be that Judging according to Appearance, which is opposed to Righteous Judgment.

As it is not, in the Third place, to suspect Ill of a Person upon considerable signs and circumstances, that is, upon such as would

would determin my Opinion in any other Matter wholly indifferent, and where I have no Interest, Passion, or Prejudice concern'd, to have it thus or otherwise. To pronounce Absolutely and Peremptorily in such a case, would indeed be a degree of Censoriousness beyond the allowance of either Charity or Prudence, because the Conclusion would then exceed the force of the Premises, which is ill in *Logick*, and worse in *Morality*; but a bare Suspicion is very Warrantable upon such grounds, and consistent with the highest Charity and Prudence of a Christian; for *Suspicion* is not Evil as Suspicion, being as such only a certain degree of Assent, which cannot be evil in its own Nature, but is either so or otherwise, according as the grounds are upon which it proceeds. Indeed to be *Suspicious*, we commonly take in an ill Sense, and reckon it among the Characters of an ill Man, not that we think *Suspecting* to be in it self unlawful, but because we suppose the Man whom we call Suspicious, more apt and forward to entertain ill Suspicions, than in the reason of the thing he ought to be. But if the grounds of my Suspicion be just and reasonable, such as considering Men use to be determined by in other matters of acknowledged Indifferency, it will then be as lawful for me to Suspect as to Judge more



absolutely upon grounds that are more clear and evident.

There are (I observe) a certain sort of Men in the World who are not only careless and regardless of their Behaviour, not using that Caution and Circumspection which they ought and easily might for the prevention of ill Suspicions, but studiously order the course of their Conversation so, as if they were fond of Jealousies, and laid a Trap for Censure, and designed to *decoy* Men into an ill opinion of them; and then (which is the most surprizing thing of all,) as soon as they have caught their Prey, and are thought and spoken amiss of, they cry out, the World is censorious, and where's your Charity? But in the First place, are not these Men even with the World? Don't they Censure as much as they themselves are Censured? But to let that pass, how do they make good their Charge? Why, they say they are Innocent, they are not the Men the World has taken and represented them for. It may be so, but sure my Charity does not stand or fall with the Truth of your Guilt, the Question as to that being not whether you are really the Man I took you to be, but whether you have not given me just and reasonable grounds to think so. And if you have, 'tis not your *Innocence* that will condemn me of unjust *Censure*, any more than it will acquit you from the Crime of *Scandal*. If

If therefore these great Pretenders to Charity and Candor, would have the ill-natured World leave off Censuring according to such Appearances, let them be more careful to abstain from all *Appearances of Evil*; for as long as Men put on Bears Skins, the Dogs will Bark; and to be angry with them if they do, is as absurd, as to give them the Occasion. For what if you walk not in the *Counsel of the Ungodly*? yet if you *stand in the way of Sinners*, and *sit in the Seat of the Scornful*, if you have all the Symptoms and Appearances of an ill Man, I have good grounds to suspect you as such, and a well-grounded Suspicion is always according to Charity. Thus if a Man who for many Years past, has been vehemently suspected to be of a different Religion from that which he openly Professes, should at length when the warm influence of a like-perswaded Princes Favour, invites him to come abroad and dismantle his Secrecies, and at such a period of this Life too, when 'tis to be presumed that the vibration of his Judgment has been long since over, and settled in the point of its gravity, and that he had no new Changes to make; if I say, he should then appear to be what the World took him for long before, I hope 'tis a pardonable Censure, if I think he has been a Dissembling Hypocrite all along, and that he would have continued so to the last, if

Opportunity and Countenance had not put an end to his Diffimulation.

To think Ill of a Man upon such Grounds and Appearances as these, is to think *rational*ly, and how can he transgress, that duly follows the conduct of his Reason? The Wise Son of *Sirach* allows greater Liberty, when he tells us, that a *Man's Attire, Excess of Laughter and Gait, shew what he is*; that is, afford us just Measure whereby to judge of him, to judge him to be none of the Wise. And our Saviour reproves the *Jews* for not discerning the face of the Times, *Luke 12. 56.* And if a Man may Judge of the Times, then why not of those that live in them, and upon whose account alone it is that one Time is distinguished from another in relation to Good or Evil? In all this therefore we sin not, nor charge our Neighbours foolishly. But this we do.

First, Whenever we take up an Ill Opinion of a Man rashly and suddenly, and at first dash prick him down for a Knave, without so much as giving our selves the trouble of inquiring into the merits of the cause; there are too many that do so, that let their Thoughts and Tongues too run before their Wit; that throw out their Censures at random, and speak Evil *extempore*, without considering of *whom* they talk, or *what*, or *why*: Men that are for running down every one  
that

that comes in their way, and are for passing Sentence immediately without any trial or examination, nay, without so much as the formality of asking, *Guilty or not Guilty* ? This is certainly a very preposterous headlong method against all sense and good breeding as well as Charity. 'Tis like the *Jews* that were all for Crucifying the Lord of Life before they had heard him. But this is such a gross piece of Injustice as sufficiently condemns it self ; all therefore that I shall further say to the Men of this Practice is, that he who makes haste to *Censure*, can no more be Innocent, than he that makes haste to be *Rich* ; and that if we ought to consider before we venture to *Commend*, (as Wise Men say we ought) then much more ought we before we *Condemn*.

Secondly, When though we do consider, and make some enquiry into the cause, and withal find some ground and foundation for an ill Judgment, yet we conclude beyond the force of the Premises, and give a Peremptory Sentence, where there are grounds for no higher an Assent, than Opinion or Suspicion. This is a certain sign that we are not determined by the Moments of Truth, by the strength of Reason and Argument, but by some other By-Consideration and partial Inducement. For were our Judgments guided and determined by the sole Appearances  
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of Truth, 'tis impossible that our Assent should be stronger than the Evidence that causes it. For the Understanding of it self, can be determined no farther than as the Object appears to be either true or false ; if it be, all that over plus of Judgment that exceeds the degrees of Evidence, must be produced by some other cause ; the Evidence alone could cause no more than what was proportionable to it. There is indeed a mixture in all such Judgments, and the *Will* has a part in them as well as the *Understanding*. He therefore that concludes worse of another than in Appearance he has reason to do, must be supposed in some measure *willing* to do so, that is, in other Words, to be under some Malice or Prejudice against him ; and he that judges upon such Principles, can never judge Righteous Judgment.

Thirdly, This we do when we conceive an ill Apprehension of a Person from one or two single instances of his Life, without considering the general tenour of his Conversation : This is a very unjust way of proceeding, and contrary to all Human and Divine Measures. The main current of a Man's Life is to be regarded, and if this maintain a regular Course, 'tis not here and there a little straggling Rivulet that should spoil the Character. For if the Denomination ought always to be taken from the major part, certainly

tainly much more so when it lies on the most favourable side. To ballance therefore one single *wandering Star* against a whole *Constellation* of regular actions, is a very ill sort of unrighteous Judgment, and such as the best of Men could never be able to abide, who must needs all be cast in such a Court as this. Such a way of Judging therefore, is not to be indured, especially considering that the Supream Judge of all, does not Judge us at this rate, but often proceeds by a contrary measure, and suffers one single Vertue to cover a multitude of Sins.

Fourthly and Lastly, To give one general Measure for all; this we do whenever our ill Opinion of a Man is built upon such poor and slight Appearances, and would not be sufficient to gain our Assent in any other indifferent matter, wherein we are altogether disinterested which way the Scale turns, or prevail with us to think the same concerning another Person. This is a sure Sign that Prejudice holds the Ballance, ('tis held so uneven,) and that we judge what we would willingly *have*. And this is more particularly that Judging according to appearance, which our Lord here condemns. For thus stood the Case, our Saviour had perform'd a Cure upon the Sabbath-day, among those who were Superstitious Observers of it; now this carried some Appearance of its Violation

on : Whereupon the *Jews* tax him with Prophaning that Holy *Rest*, not at all reflecting either upon *Moses's* seeming inconsistency, in appointing such a troublesome work as *Circumcision* to be done on that day, as often as it happened to be the *Eighth*, or upon *themselves* for then administering it. But the reason was plain, they were soundly prejudiced against *Christ*, but not against *Moses* or *themselves*. Well therefore might our Lord say, *if a Man on the Sabbath-day receive Circumcision, that the Law of Moses should not be broken, are ye angry at me, because I have made a Man every whit whole on the Sabbath-day ? Will you wound upon that day, and shall not I heal ? Judge not according to Appearance, (κατ' ὄψιν, according to every slight superficial Appearance, such as you your selves would not submit to in another case,) but Judge Righteous Judgment. The great Reasonableness and Necessity of which Precept comes now in the last place to be considered.*

Its Equity relies mainly upon this double ground, the ill Principle that such superficial Judging proceeds from, and the ill Consequences it leads to.

First, It proceeds from an ill Principle ; it argues First, that we are conscious of some inward Baseness in our selves, something that is very low and sordid, which makes us so prone and easie to suspect the same in others ;

others ; as he that is Drunk himself, fancies every one else to be so that he meets. It argues Secondly, that we thirst after Eminency, and yet despair of attaining it any other way, then by levelling those about us ; which makes us so ready and willing to discover Spots in the Moon, and Flaws in the most Solid and *Massy* Vertue. It argues Thirdly, a Mind very disaffected to our Neighbour, to Human Nature indeed, and as much alienated from true Spirit of Love and Goodness. That we are full of Envy, Pride, Malice and Prejudice ; that we love to dwell upon Sores and Deformities, that we take a secret pleasure in the Follies and Infirmities of Mankind, and grieve at that whereat the Angels rejoyce, namely, the wise Behaviour and good order of Men, all which is Inhuman and Diabolical, fit only for Devils and Evil Spirits, but altogether contrary to the *unselfish universalized* nature of God, who rejoyced when he saw all things good and perfect ; and to *Charity*, whose Character St. *Paul* tells us, is, that *It rejoyces not in Iniquity*, 1 Cor. 13. 6.

But Secondly, the *Consequences* of this sort of Judging are as bad as the Principle ; for 1<sup>st</sup>, He that proceeds to Judgment upon every little Appearance, must needs be often mistaken, and give Sentence with an *Erring Key*, and so often incur that Woe pronounced



ced by the Prophet against all such as call Evil Good, and Good Evil; *Isa. 5. 20.* because Falshood often wears the guise of Truth, and things seem otherwise than they are. Thus the Affability and free Conversation of our Saviour, which was really the effect of his great Humility and condescending Goodness, and of his earnest desire to benefit Mankind, was hardly Censured by the Maligning *Jews*, and misconstrued as a piece of Levity and Dissoluteness; *Behold say they, a Man Gluttonous, and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners: Mat. 11. 19.* By this means we shall mis-rate both Persons and Things, and often deny those our good word, who it may be, if better known, deserve even our Reverence and Admiration. By this means private Grudges will be entertain'd, and open Quarrels will be broach'd. Mens Affections will be groundlessly and unaccountably estranged from one another, the Bands of Friendship will be untied, and Men will be jealous and afraid of their dearest well-wishers; good Constitutions will suffer for Personal Miscarriages, good Churches for unworthy Members, good Religions for ill Professors, good Counsels and good Causes for their ill Success; and lastly, that good Reputation which all Men exceedingly value, and which some Men have a fair Right to, and which the Wisest of Men prefers before

fore great Riches, *Prov.* 22. 4. will be wounded by the Roving Shot of every Gossipping Tongue.

To which I may add in the last place, that when Men have once accustomed themselves to hard Censures, upon small Appearances, they will be apt to enlarge their Court of Judicature, and from Censuring the Actions of *Men*, proceed to Question and Condemn the Dispensations of *Providence*, and say with the Impious House of *Israel*, *the way of the Lord is not equal*.

It concerns us all therefore to use that Faculty with great Discretion, upon the right or wrong use of which so much depends ; to Judge with Caution, and Circumspection, and Mercy here, lest we find Judgment without Mercy hereafter.

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## A Discourse concerning Religious Singularity.

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Rom. 12. 2. *Be not Conformed to this World.*

ONE of the greatest Supporters of Absurdity in Speculation, and of Immorality in Practice, is *Authority*; that of *Doctrine* in the former, and that of *Example* in the latter. It misguides and perverts the whole Man, puts a false Bias upon the whole motion of the Soul, imposes both upon our Understandings and upon our Wills, corrupts both our Sentiments and our Practices, and leads us out of the way both of *Truth* and *Vertue*. But it has a greater and more prevailing influence upon our Actions than upon our Sentiments, and our Lives suffer more by it than our Opinions. For besides, that there are more Examples of ill Living than of ill Thinking, and a well-moralized Conversation, is a greater Rarity, than an Orthodox Head, there being not such Temptations and Occasions to *Error* as there are to *Vice*; there is also this further difference,

difference, that in our *Opinions* we more usually follow those Authorities which stand off at a great distance from us, and which Antiquity by I know not what Artifice, recommend to us as Sacred and Venerable. But in our *Actions* we take a quite contrary measure, and are rather apt to conform our selves to the Genius and Mode of the Age we live in, which being present, shines upon us, with a direct and perpendicular Ray, and more strongly influences and provokes our Imitation and Compliance.

And truly this is the greatest Mischief that is derived upon the Minds of Men from Authority, and the chiefest Head of Complaint that lies against it ; were it only a Stop to the Advancement of Learning, or a Misleader of our Understandings in Speculative Inquiries ; were it only a Bar to Notional Improvements, or a Betrayer of our Orthodoxy, it might be thought to have done Penance enough under the Chastisement of a Satyr or Declamation. For the greatest stock of Knowledge which upon the best Advantages we can attain to, is so inconsiderable, that 'tis hardly worth while to be very angry and fall out with what stands in our way, and hinders our little Progress. There is no great Mischief done ; 'tis like spoiling what was spoil'd before, and which otherwise would come to little. But since 'tis the great

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Enemy to all Righteousness, as well as to all Truth, since it debauches our Morals as well as our Understandings, and spoils the *Christian* as well as the *Philosopher*, 'tis fit it should be arraigned before an higher Court, and be Condemned by the Censure of an *Apostle*. And so it is, and that upon great and weighty Reasons, in the Words of the Text, *Be not Conformed to this World.*

In the Words, we may consider a *Supposition* and a *Caution*. The Supposition is Twofold.

First, That the general course of the World is very bad, and that Vice has by much the Majority of its side.

Secondly, That we are naturally apt to imitate that which is most prevailing, and to conform to the course and way of the World.

Lastly, the *Caution* is against this Inclination, that we should not be Conformed to the modes and usages of this World; which I shall first *state* as to its Measure and Limits, and then *Justify* as to its Equity and Reasonableness; and so conclude with some Practical Remarks upon the whole.

And in the First Place, 'tis here supposed, that the general course of the World is very bad, and that Vice has by much the Majority of its side. This, though at first sight it looks like a *Common Place*, a matter of frequent, obvious and familiar Consideration,  
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is yet a thing that is not often thoroughly considered, and there are but few that have a true, lively, and affectionate Sense of it. 'Tis not easie for those that are good themselves, to imagine how bad others are, and how much Wickedness there is in the World; and as for Evil Men, they don't use to trouble their Heads with such serious Reflections: So that neither of them are like to have a just sense and resentment of this matter.

The World we commonly compare to a *Theatre*; and truly for the number of Actors, and the variety of Action, 'tis the most Pompous and Magnificent of any; but the Parts that are acted upon it, are for the most, very Tragical, and its Scenes full of Horrour and Confusion. For not to mention unjust and causeless Wars, Massacres, Rebellions and Murthers, which like *Earth-quakes* make the frame of Nature to tremble, and threaten the fall of the Stage upon which they are Acted; who can reckon up the open Oppressions, and the secret Frauds, the Violences and the Deceits, the Extortions and the Over-reachings, with all the Arts of Falshood and Subtilty which are every where and every day made use of among Men, to dispossess one another of their Rights and Fortunes? And who is there that can imagine what private Insinuations, what sly Contrivances, what spiteful Whisperings,

what treacherous Arts there are daily used even among those that profess Dearness and Kindness to one another, to undermine one anothers Interest, and blast one anothers Honours and Reputations ? I need not go to the Courts of Princes for this, those Schools and Nurseries of Immortality, for there is scarce any Society of Men free from it. To this, if I should add the unnatural Feuds of Relations, the ungrateful Returns of obliged Persons, the Treacheries of the Marriage-Bed, the Falsenesses of Friends, the Ill Office of Neighbours, and the Intolerable Practices of Revenge, not only upon pretences of Honour among the *Duellists*, but as they are generally carried on by the Power and Interest of great Men, by the corrupt and vexatious methods of the Law, and by the common malice of the World ; if I say I should add this and a thousand times more that might be said, what a Picture should I draw of Mankind, and what intelligent Spirit is there that would not be afraid, (if such an account should be given him before-hand,) to be *Born* into, or to *Live* in such a World as this ?

But thus it was immediately upon the beginning of things, thus it has been in all Ages, and thus it will be till the Arch-Angel's Trumpet shall at once awaken us from the sleep of Death, and from the sleep of Sin,  
and

and Time it self shall be no more. For no sooner had God finished his Creation, and declared all things good in it, and began to take a Complacency in the works of his Hands, but *through Envy of the Devil, Sin came into the World*, and untuned the proportions of its new set Harmony; and being once planted in the Earth, it liked the Soil, and increased and multiplied by the care and industry of the Devil, as fast as Mankind could by the *Benediction* of God. Infomuch that God who not long before was represented by *Moses* as Creating Man upon the most considerate Pause of Counsel and Deliberation, is now brought in, repenting that ever he had made him, *Gen. 6. 6.* And accordingly, he first shortens his Days, and that expedient failing, he proceeds to a severer Judgment, and issues forth a Sentence to destroy him from the face of the Earth, *Ver. 5.* For *God saw that the Wickedness of Man was great, and that every Imagination of the Thoughts of his Heart was evil continually.* And again the Text says, that *God look'd upon the Earth, and behold it was Corrupt, for all Flesh had Corrupted his way upon the Earth, Ver. 12.*

And truly 'tis incredible almost to think to what a pitch of Villany and Wickedness the World was then arrived in so short a time; the World then like some of our Modern



Sinners, was young in Years and old in Debauchery; it look'd as if the Devil being newly thrown out of Heaven, were in the very height of his Malice and Resentment, and to retrieve again the lost Field, endeavoured to increase his Numbers, to double his Ranks by making Men as very Devils as himself. For Vice seem'd to reign Absolute and Uncontroul'd, and to have taken full Possession of the whole Earth, so that excepting only Four Persons, *Abel, Seth, Enos, and Enoch*, we read not of one good Man from *Adam* to *Noah*; so extreemly Wicked and Debauch'd was the World at that time, and so highly deserving of that Emphatical Character which the Apostle St. Peter gives of it, calling it *Kosmos aischron*, the *World of the Ungodly*: 2 Pet. 2. 5. As if it were a state directly opposite to that of the Blessed *Millennium*, to that new Heaven and new Earth, wherein as the same Apostle tells us, *dwelleth Righteousness*.

But this you'll say, was at a time when God had not given any express Directory for the Manners of Men, who were then left to the sole guidance of their natural light, which at best is but a doubtful Twilight, and is withal apt to be clouded and corrupted by ill Customs and Practices, and in a little time to be quite extinguished with the *Damps* of Vice and Debauchery.

Let us see therefore how it fared with the course

course of the World after the giving of the *Law*, when God had trim'd the dim Lamp of natural Conscience, when Revelation had illustrated the obscure Text of Reason, and the Moral, like the Natural World, was governed by a greater as well as by a lesser Light. Now sure one would expect that Men should walk as *Children of the Day*, and that works of Darkneſs should diſappear like Miſts before the Riſing Sun. And queſtionleſs, it muſt be acknowledged that the State of the Moral World was conſiderably better'd by this new acceſſion of Light, and that there was leſs Vice and more goodneſs among thoſe who enjoy'd it; the Peculiar People of God, than among the rude Heathen, who had no knowledge of his Laws. For to what purpoſe ſhould God viſit them with this his Day-ſpring from on high, and give Light to them that ſate in Darkneſs and in the ſhadow of Death, but only that he might the better guide their Feet into the way of Peace?

In compariſon therefore of the Heathen World, this was a good ſtate of things; but yet Vice had ſtill the upper hand, and conſidering the vaſt diſproportion between the Numbers of good and bad Men, the World might ſtill be called *κοσμος ἀνομῶν, the World of the Ungodly*. For not to mention the particular Vices of that perverſe and untracta-

ble People the *Jews*, their Superstition, their Idolatry, their Infidelity, their Rebelliousness, their Lust and Luxury, their Uncharity, their Covetousness and the like, the Scripture seems to speak of that state and age of the World in general, as if 'twere quite overgrown with Wickedness, and as if Vertue were a Stranger among the Dwellings of Men. Thus the Psalmist, *Help me Lord, for there is not one Godly Man left, the Faithful are minished from among the Children of Men*, Psal. 12. And again, *The Lord look'd down from Heaven upon the Children of Men to see if there were any that would understand, and seek after God*. And what was the result of this Scrutiny? Why, *they are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become abominable, there is none that doth good, no not one*, Psal. 14. And again says the Psalmist, speaking of City of Jerusalem, *I have spied Unrighteousness and Strife in the City, Day and Night they go about within the Walls thereof, Mischief also and Sorrow are in the midst of it; Wickedness is therein; Deceit and Guile go not out of their Streets*, Psal. 55. And again more largely, Psal. 74. *All the Earth is full of Darkness and Cruel Habitations*. And again lastly, to add no more, *They will not be Learned nor Understand, all the Foundations of the Earth are out of Course*, Psal. 82.

Thus miserably deformed was the face of things

things in this state and period of the World: Nor were only the *Morals* of Men universally Corrupt, but they had debauched and corrupted their very *Principles* too, and defaced the *Map* that was to guide and direct them, as well as lost their *Way*. They had almost put out the light of Revelation as well as that of Natural Reason, so that by that time our Saviour appeared in the World, what by ill Glosses and worse Practices, the People of God had almost reduced themselves again to the state of Darkness and shadow of Death, and defaced the Characters of the *Mosaick Table*, as much as there Forefathers had done those of the *Law of Nature*.

But then again, perhaps it will be said, that this was at a time when God had not made any clear and express Revelation of Heaven or Hell; and therefore though Men had a written Law to walk by, yet it being supported by no other Sanctions than of temporal Rewards and Punishments, they wanted a sufficient *Counterpoise* against the violence of Temptations; and than no wonder that Wickedness should so universally prevail, when the Allurements to Vice were strong, and the engagements to Duty but weak and unconstraining. But when once Obedience comes to be enforced by better Promises and by severer Threatnings, this certainly will introduce a new way of Living;  
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Men will consider more, and live better, and will never be so mad and silly as to spend a few days in Wickedness and Folly, and then in a moment go down to the Grave, and be Damned for ever.

Let us see therefore how 'tis with the Moral World under the Revelation of the great *Mystery of Godliness*, and now Life and Immortality are brought to light by the Gospel ; this I think fully answers the Objection : Now therefore certainly one would expect at least a state of *Millennial* Happiness ; that Men should be, and live like Angels ; that we should see the Tabernacle of God come down and abide among Men, with a new Heaven and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth Righteousness. But alas, the Mystery of Iniquity began to work as soon as the Mystery of Godliness ; and although the Primitive Christians were for a while kept bright and shining in the Furnace of Persecution, yet no sooner was the heat of their Affliction over, but their Zeal cool'd with it, and they left their first Love. For then it was that the great *Dragon* being wroth that the Woman was delivered of a Man-Child, that *Constantine* the Great was Converted by the Church to the Christian Faith, though to overwhelm her by casting out of his Mouth that mighty Flood of *Arianism*, Rev. 12. And although the Earth helped the Woman,

man,

man, by opening her Mouth, and swallowing up the Flood, which was done when the First Council of Nice declared against that Pestilent and Prevailing Heresy ; yet 'twas not long before the same Dragon cast forth two other mighty Floods out of his Mouth, and the Christian World suffered almost an inundation by the breaking in of *Popery* and *Mahumetism*.

We have indeed by the Blessing of God, and the Zealous Endeavours of good Men, dried up one of those great Floods from a good part of the Christian World, and restored the *Doctrin* of the Gospel to its Primitive Purity and Simplicity. But has the *Reformation* gone on so prosperously in our *Manners*, as it has in our *Faith* ? Are we as *Good* as we are *Orthodox* ? I doubt not ; for if we look abroad into the World, how little true Goodness and Vertue shall we find in it ! How rare is it to meet with a Man that lives up within some tolerable measure to the Obligations of his Profession ! And how much more rare is it to see one that's truly Serious and Considerate, Circumspect and Recollected, that considers thoroughly and effectually the End of his coming into the World, the shortness and uncertainty of his stay in it ; and what shall become of him when he is to go out of it ? And accordingly, Lives under a constant and lively sense of God and  
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of his Duty to him, walks with him, and gives up himself wholly to him, makes Religion and the care of his Soul the main business and concern of his Life ; works with all his Might while 'tis Day, and is utterly resolved whatever it costs him, to mind and secure the *One thing necessary* ! This one would think were no more than what common Sense would prompt any Man to, that would allow himself to think but one Minute in a Year ; and yet how few such Men shall we find in the World ! Do we not rather see Men drink down Iniquity like Water, and commit Sin with Greediness ? Do not the generality of Men live as if they were resolved to sin as much as they could in a little time, and thought it not only safe, but necessary to do ill ? Do they not live as if they were to be nothing after this Life, or as if they were to be saved by their Vices rather than by their Vertues ; or lastly, as if they thought Hell a better Place than Heaven, and were in love with Damnation and Everlasting Burnings ?

But to come a little nearer to our selves, does not the present Age abound with a sort of Men who are Crafty and Designing, False and Treacherous, Rotten and Hypocritical ; Men that seem to have their Eye fixed upon, and terminated with the Horizon of this World ; that make Gain their Godliness,  
and

and Interest their Measure ; that will betray the Church for Preferment, sell their Religion and their Souls for Mony, that will depart from the way of Truth for the Wages of Unrighteousness, and be Damned hereafter to be Rich and Great here ? Never was there more Religion pretended than now, and never less in truth and reality ; never more noise about it, and never a less hearty concern for it. What straining about the Gnat of a Ceremony, with those who can in the mean while Swallow down whole Camels of profitable Abominations ! This we may talk of, and lament, but we can't help it. 'Twill be ever so with the general course of the World ; Vice will always have the Cry of her side, and we are told, that in the latter days *Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.* And all this we may learn from the final issue and event of things ; we may measure the state of this World, from the final distribution of things in the next. Our Saviour tells us, that *broad is the Way that leads to Destruction, and many there be that go in thereat. And that strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leads to Life, and few there be that find it, Mat. 7. 13.*

And this we shall the less wonder at, if we consider the universal pravity and corruptness of Human Nature, the Multitude of Temptations we are *all* exposed to, and the



the peculiar unhappy Circumstances of Living that many Men are engaged in : To which if we add the great Strength, Cunning and Malice of the Invisible Powers, that the same Envy of the Devil that first brought Sin into the World, is still concerned to uphold and increase it ; that there are two different Interests carrying on, that there is a Kingdom of Darkness as well as a Kingdom of Light, and a Mystery of Iniquity, as well as a Mystery of Godliness ; we can't think any other, but that the course of the World must needs be very bad. And the wonder will fall yet lower, if we further consider how prone we are to confirm and strengthen an ill Custom by our *Imitation* and *Compliance* ; which leads me to the Second thing supposed, that we are naturally apt to imitate that which is most prevailing, and to conform to the Course and Way of the World.

Now this we are apt to do for one of these Two Reasons ; either because we think the generality has the Right of its side, and that what most Men do, is fit to be done. Or if we do think they are in the wrong, and do amiss, yet we are loath to venture the Charge of *Singularity*, and withal, fancy that there is something of safety and excuse in Numbers and Multitudes.

And First, we are apt to think, that the  
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generality has the Right of its side, and that what most Men do, is fit to be done. There is nothing that carries so much Authority with it, as the Example of a Multitude ; and though every Man is ready to imagin himself Wiser than any one of these singly, yet when he looks upon them as a Body of Men, there is something awful and commanding in it ; the Man blushes to himself, as we are apt to do when we come into an assembly in Public, though made up of Men, every one of which we think inferior to our selves ; but their Numbers and Union give them another Air and Appearance, and the Voice of the People becomes to us now as the Voice of God.

'Tis in Practice as in Opinion, what the most *bold* we take to be *True*, and so what the most *do* we take to be *Good*. This is the only Rule some People have to go by, and 'tis the Measure that all *Popular* Spirits do go by, and the Wifest can hardly refrain it ; for we can hardly think it likely, that such an United and Complicated Wisdom should be mistaken either in the one or the other. Every Man is apt to reason with himself in the conduct of his Manners, as *Luther* did in the business of the Reformation, *Art thou the only Wise Man ? And, can so many Worlds err ?* What ? Shall we oppose our selves against the Practice of Mankind, set up for *Reformers,*

*mers*, row against so great a Stream, and live against the World? Can there be any ill in that which so many do, which is passed into a Custom and a Law, which is practised all the World over? Ought we not rather to suspect our own Judgments, and conclude, that that must needs be the right Point, where so many Lines meet, and that the right Way where we find so many Passengers? This is the Common and the Natural Logick of most Men, and by this Measure we proceed both in *Opinion* and in *Practice*, but especially in *Practice*. And this is one cause of our aptness to Conform to the Course and Way of the World. But there is also another.

For Secondly, if we do think that the Generality is in the wrong, and does amiss, yet we are loth to venture the charge of Singularity, and withal, fancy that there is something of safety and excuse in Numbers and Multitudes. And first, as to the Charge of *Singularity*, 'tis a dreadful and a frightful Word, and there are but few that have the Courage and the Confidence to stand up against and face the Imputation. We either think the World Wiser than our selves, or would willingly be thought to do so, since this has a shew of Modesty and good Manners, and the contrary seems to carry in it an intolerable degree of Pride and Self-*arrogancy*.

gancy. But now to be Singular in any of our Actions, is interpretatively and in effect, to prefer our own Sense and Judgment, before that of the World, at least as far as concerns the particular case then before us. For since our Actions are governed by our present Sentiments, if we *do* otherwise than the World does, 'tis plain that we *think* otherwise too, and that we set a higher value upon those private Thoughts of ours, than upon the publick Sense and Judgment of the World, which is a very odious and ungrateful thing to own and publish. For we stand in awe of our Fellow Creatures more than we do of our own Consciences, especially when combined and confederated together in great Numbers and Companies, and cannot chuse but regard and revere their Censures and Animadversions. And this makes us willing rather to err with the Multitude, and be Fools for Company, though we act all the while against the clear Light of our own Minds, than incur the great Censure, the heavy *Anathema* of Singularity.

And besides, we think there is no *necessity* neither of running that risque, for we reckon our selves secure enough without it, and are apt to flatter our selves into a fancy that there is something of Safety and Excuse in Numbers and Multitudes: Though we know we are in the ways of Sin, yet we comfort and

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incourage our selves to go on in them by thinking how much they are *frequented*, like Travellers wandering in the Dark, who though they know they are out of their way, yet solace themselves in their Number and Company. This is very natural and ordinary for Men to do in all Cases, in the Case of Sin and Error as well as in others; and therefore the Psalmist speaking of the gathering together of the Froward, and of the insurrection of Wicked Doers, (which supposes them Many and in Companies) immediately adds, *They incourage themselves in Mischief*, Psal. 64. This is a very usual but vain confidence; for however the Multitude of Offenders may be a Security against an Earthly Power, yet God regards *Numbers* no more than *Persons*, and *though hand joyn in hand, the Wicked shall not go unpunished*, Prov. 11. 21.

These are the Grounds and Principles upon which we are inclined to be Conformable to the general Course of the World. But 'tis high time now to shew why we should not be so; and this leads me to consider lastly, the Caution it self, that we should not be Conformable to the World: But before I come to justify this Caution, as to its Equity and Reasonableness, I must premise something concerning its Limits and Measures.

And first, this Caution is not so rigorously

to be understood, as if we were not to yield some compliance and conformity with the Humours and Dispositions of those with whom we converse ; for this is a necessary part of Homilitical Vertue, and contributes very much to the sweetning and indearing of Society, and is therefore Good and Commendable, as well as Innocent and Lawful. 'Tis indeed that very thing which we call *Good-nature*, when a Man bends and warps a little from his own natural Posture, to meet and strike in with the inclination of his Companions. And the contrary is so far from being a Vertue, that 'tis a culpable stiffness and obstinacy of Mind ; and we may take this for a rule, that Religion is ever consistent with Civility and good Manners, as indeed it is with whatever really conduces to the Comfort and Happiness of Human Life. We are only to take care that our Compliance prove not a Snare to us, an occasion of falling into Sin ; that we do not offend God, out of Civility towards Men: In all other Cases, we would do well to consider and follow that of the Apostle, *I am made all things to all Men*, 1 Cor. 9. 22. And again, *I please all Men in all things*, 10. 33.

Neither again Secondly, is this Caution to be so rigorously understood, as if we were forbidden to conform to the several indifferent Modes of Ages or of Countries, either

as to Customs or Ceremonies, whether Religious or Civil, or Habits, or manner of Address, or way of Diet, or the like. For however these may not possibly be ordered according to the best convenience or measure of Discretion, yet 'tis according to the publick Wisdom of the Place and Nation, (for the Wisdom of a Nation is seen as much in their *Customs* as in their *Proverbs*,) and therefore the matter of them being supposed indifferent, 'tis not civil or modest to contradict them. And there is this further to be considered, that besides the pride and rudeness of such an opposition, all the advantage or convenience a Man can get by it, will not compensate for the Odium and Censure of Affectation and Singularity. And accordingly we find, that the Wisest of Men in all Ages have ever thought it Prudence to conform to the Innocent, though otherwise not so convenient Customs of the Age and Place wherein they lived. And 'tis observed concerning our Blessed Saviour himself, who was the Wisdom of the Eternal Father, that when he condescended to put on Flesh, and live among Men, he condescended yet further, and complied with all the received Customs and Manners of the *Jewish* Nation. And indeed he became in all things like unto his Brethren, Sin only excepted; *Innocence* was his only Singularity.

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And this, in one Word, is our measure; we may and ought to be conformable as far as the bounds of Innocence; *usque ad Aras* is the measure of our civil Conversation, as well as of our Friendship and dearer Intimacies: For why should we shew so much disrespect to our Company, as to quit the Road they have taken, if we may safely travel in it? The Conformity therefore which we are here cautioned against, is that of Imitating the general Practice of the World, as to Actions, not of a *Civil*, but of a *Moral* Nature: We must not be Conformed to the general Morals of this World; the Reason and Equity of which Caution I come now to justify.

And the first Reason why we must not be Conformed to this World, is because this is not such a World as we may safely imitate, 'Tis not a World for us to be Conformed to; it never was so even in the Best and Purest Times, much less is it now, in these last and worst days. 'Tis not safe following the Multitude at any *time*, much less now; nor in any *thing*, but least of all in the ordering our Life and Conversation. 'Tis a very ill Guide in matters of Opinion, but much worse in matters of Practice; for the World is a meer Theatre of Folly, a Stage of Vice and Debauchery, one great *Aceldama* of Blood and Cruelty, and to use the Descrip-



tion of St. John, *the whole World lieth in Wickedness*, Joh. 5. 19. the Words are Emphatical, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, it has not only fallen into the Gulph of Sin, but it lies there contentedly and quietly. 'Tis not only slightly dipt or stain'd with the Waters of Impurity, but it lies as it were *Moated round*, or rather all over drench'd and soak'd in them, like the Earth in the Universal Deluge : But this I need pursue no further, having already made it a distinct Member of my Discourse.

Again Secondly, another Reason why we must not be Conformed to this World, is because by so doing, we shall confirm and strengthen the cause of Wickedness, and give it Settlement, Succession and Perpetuity : For we shall countenance and imbolden those whom *we* imitate, and cause others to imitate us, and they again will be a President to others, and so on, 'till Vice pretend to the Right of Custom and Prescription, and Iniquity be established by a Law. This is one great Reason why the World is so bad now, and 'tis the best expedient the Devil has to make it yet worse ; for by this the Vices of the former Ages descend upon the future, Sin becomes Hereditary, Children transcribe their Vicious Parents, and Actual, like Original Sin, is intail'd upon Posterity. *Fill ye up the Measure of your Fathers*, Mat. 23. 32. said our Saviour by way of Prophecy to  
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the *Jews*, implying that they would do so; for our Lord very well knew the Temper of those to whom he said it; and I question not, but that most of the Wickedness of that Nation was owing to this, that they were so generally possessed with this Superstitious Humour of *Conformity*, and were resolved to do as their Forefathers had done before them.

Again Thirdly, another Reason why we Christians must not Conform to this World, is because both the *Precepts* and the *Rewards* of our Religion require a very different method of Life from what is ordinarily practised; the *Precepts* are strict and severe, and the *Rewards* high and noble, such indeed as cannot be conceived for their greatness, and they both call for a very excellent and extraordinary way of Conversation; for after the common way of Living, we shall neither *obtain* the one, nor *fulfil* the other. Indeed our Religion obliges us to great Strictness and Singularity, and a Christian cannot be like himself if he be like other Men. To be a Christian indeed, is to be a *New Creature*, to be New in Nature, and New in Life and Conversation; he must not be like his former self, much less like the rest of the World. The Argument is the Apostle's, *Ye are all the Children of Light, and the Children of the Day*; that is, Christians,

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Professors of an holy and excellent Religion, whose Precepts are excellently Good, and whose Promises are excellently Great. And what then? *Therefore let us not Sleep as do others, but let us Watch and be Sober,* 1 Thes. 5. 5, 6.

Again, Fourthly and Lastly, We Christians have one more peculiar Reason not to be conformed to this World; we have renounced it in our Baptism, with all its Poms and Vanities: By which are meant, not only the Heathen Games and Spectacles, their vain Shews, and loose Festivities, their lewd *Bacchanals* and *Saturnals*, which we renounce *Absolutely*, and the Wealth and Glory and Grandeur even of the *Christian* World, as often as they prove inconsistent with the ends of our Holy Institution; but also the promiscuous Company, the general Practices, and the popular Examples of this World, which are generally so very Corrupt and Wicked, that we renounce them not upon supposition, as in the other instance, but at a venture. The very first step to a Christian Life, is to dye to the World, and to its general Usages and Customs; and if we will follow Christ, we must forsake the *Multitudes*, and ascend up to the Mount of Solitude and Holy Separation.

And that we may be the better encouraged to undertake this *Religious Singularity*, let us to the Reason of the thing, add Two very remarkable

remarkable Scripture Examples : The First that invites our Consideration, is that of *Lot*, who happened to live in a City so prodigiously Wicked, and beyond all Measure or Example Debauched, that though a very Populous Place, it could not afford so much as *Ten* good Men; they were so universally seiz'd with the Pest and Contagion of Vice. And yet this good Man, though he breath'd in so corrupt an Air, was not at all infected with it ; the health and cleanness of his Soul, like that of *Socrates's* Body, was too strong for the Contagion, and preserved him from the Malignity of a Plauge that was more Infectuous and more Mortal too, than that of *Athens*. Indeed the filthy Conversation of that Wicked Place, disturb'd his *Quiet*, but it could not sully his *Innocence* ; it vex'd his Righteous Soul, as the Text says, 2 *Pet.* 2. 8. but it could not *debauch* it. He dwelt like the Church of *Pergamos*, where Satan's Seat was, *Rev.* 2. 13. in the very *Metropolis*, the Imperial City of the Devil's Kingdom ; but he Convers'd there like an Angel of Light among Fiends and Evil Spirits. He was surrounded with the works of Darkeness, but he had no Fellowship with them ; his *Company* was Devilish, but his *Conversation* was Angelical ; though he could not make them better, yet they could



could not make him worse ; he lived *with* them, but he lived *against* them.

This indeed was great and extraordinary ; but there is an Example of Religious Singularity beyond this, and that is in *Noah*, who lived in a *World* that was as corrupt, and more than the other's City ; the whole World then was but one greater *Sodom*, nay it was much worse than that Seat of Wickedness. *Sodom* indeed was so given up to Debauchery, that it could not yield Ten Righteous Persons, but the whole World in *Noah's* time could not afford so much as *Two* ; he himself was the only good Man then in the World, as may reasonably be concluded from that Reason expressed by God why he excepted him from the general Deluge, *For thee have I seen Righteous before me in this Generation, Gen. 7. 1.* Now 'tis impossible to imagin that Vice should ever be more in mode and fashion than it was then, when as the Text says, *All Flesh had corrupted his way upon the Earth*, and the whole Earth it self was fill'd with Violence. And yet in this all-over-wicked World, *Noah* maintained his Innocence, and his Integrity shin'd forth as a Light in the midst of this Crooked and Perverse Generation, and was not only a Doer, but a Preacher of Righteousness. In other Ages of the World, though never so Corrupt, Religion and Vertue has had some Party,

Party, and the Singularity of Living well, is shared and divided among several, and one is a Countenance and Incouragement to another; but here poor single *Noah* was fain to *Live*, as *Athanasius* was to *Dispute* against the *World*, and the whole Singularity lodged and center'd in his single Person, which puts it beyond all Example or Parallel.

And thus have I gone through the several Stages of my Undertaking, I shall now make one or two brief Reflections upon the whole, and conclude.

In relation therefore to the First Supposition, it may be inferr'd, That the Multitude is no safe Guide, and that the Measures of Right and Wrong are not always to be concluded from the consent of *Majority*; for you see here, that *Vice* has by much the Majority of its side; and yet 'tis *Vice* still.

From the Second, it may be inferr'd, That those who have already a Majority for their way, ought not to think their Cause any whit the better for having new Proselytes every day brought over to them, and because Men flock to their Standard from every Quarter. For, as it has been discoursed, this is no more than what is to be expected from the ordinary course of things. Men are naturally apt to imitate that which is most prevailing, and to conform to the course and way of the World. Those therefore

fore that value themselves or their Cause the better for this, seem not to understand the World, but to be meer Strangers to the Inclinations of Human Nature ; for did they consider that, they would quickly perceive, that this does not reflect any Credit upon their Cause, but rather upbraids the levity and weakness of Mankind, and is no argument that *they* themselves are *Wise*, but only that *other* Men are *Fools*.

Lastly, from the Caution it self, we may justly infer, that the Censure of *Preciseness* and *Singularity* which the Men of this World commonly charge upon good Men, and the Hatred and Spite wherewith they prosecute them upon that very account, are both of them utterly senseless and extreamly absurd : This has been an old Grudge. Thus the Sinners in the Book of Wisdom, *Wisd. 2. Let us lie in wait for the Righteous, because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings : He upbraideth us with our offending the Law, and objecteth to our Infamy the transgressings of our Education.* And again, *He was made to reprove our Thoughts ; He is grievous to us even to behold, for his Life is not like other Mens, his Ways are of another Fashion.* A very high Charge indeed, and as notable an Inference ; he lives otherwise and better than we do, and therefore we must hate and persecute him. But this I say is a very absurd

furd and unreasonable way of proceeding ; for the ground of the business if sifted to the bottom, comes to no more than this. They are angry with a Man for not loving their Company so well as to be content to be Damned for the sake on't. But I think we may with great Civility beg their excuse in this matter ; if they will have us do as they do, then let them take care to do as they *should* do. But for a Man to make himself a *Beast*, utterly unfit to be convers'd with, and then to call me Singular and Unsociable, because I won't keep him Company, is hard measure.

And as these Men are guilty of an unreasonable Charge, so shall we be guilty of an inexcusable Folly and Weakness, if we depart from our Duty and our greatest Interest upon such a trifling inconsiderable Discouragement : For then 'tis plain, that we are of the number of those low and unconsidering Spirits, that *love the Praise of Men, more than the Praise of God.*

Let us not therefore be led away with Noise and Popularity, nor be frightened from our Duty by those empty-Anathema's of the Multitude, the Censure of Unsociableness, Preciseness and Singularity. Let us be sure by doing our Duty, to satisfy our own Consciences, whatever others *do or think.* Let us not be carried away in the Polluted torrent



rent of the Age, nor be Fools for Company. Let us for once dare to be *Wise*, and be guilty of the great Singularity of doing well, and of acting like Men and Christians; and then, if we can have the liking and approbation of the World, well; if not, the comfort is, we shall not much want it: And we shall gain something by our *Singularity*, which the others cannot by their *Numbers*, the Favour of God, and deliverance from the Wrath to come.

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## A Discourse concerning the Excellency of Praise and Thanksgiving.

Preach'd in *All-Souls* College Chappel in Oxford, upon the Founder's Commemoration Day.

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Psal. 50. 23. *Whoso offereth Praise, glorifieth me ; Or, as in the other Translation, Whoso offereth me Thanks and Praise, he honoureth me.*

**T**O Honour and Glorifie God, as 'tis the *End* of the *whole*, so is it the *Duty* and *Priviledge* of all the *Rational* and *Intellectual* part of the *Creation*. God indeed has made all things for his *Glory*, and he fails not to glorifie himself one way or other by all things that he has made ; but there are some things which he has made to glorifie him by free and proper acts of *Worship* and *Homage*. And these as he has more *inabled*,  
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so has he more *obliged* to the Performance of this Divine Office, by distinguishing them as well by *Favours* and *Benefits*, as by Order of Being, and degrees of natural Excellence from the rest of the Creation.

Among these is *Man*, who though at present not so capable of this Divine Employ as some of the other Intellectual Orders, yet he has as much, perhaps more Obligation to it than any of them all; since God has not only favour'd him with peculiar Benefits, such as the Grace of Repentance, the Honour of being Personally united to the Divinity, &c. but has also placed him in such a Sphere where he is the only Creature that can acknowledge and pay Religious Service to the common Creator. All other Creatures Praise God only *Passively*, as far as they carry in them the Characters of the Divine Perfections, which must be considered and acknowledged before they redound to the *actual* glory of the Creator. Like a *Lute*, which though never so Harmonically Set and Tuned, yields no Musick, till its Strings be artfully touched by a Skilful Hand. But Man can freely command and strike the Strings of his own Heart and Affections, and is the only Creature here below that can *Actively* Praise and Honour his great Maker and Benefactor. Man therefore is concern'd to Honour and Glorifie God both  
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for himself and for all the Creatures round about him ; and as the whole World is the *Temple* of the great God, so Man is as it were the *Priest* in this Region of it, where he must undertake the Office of Honouring and Glorifying God, not only in his own, but also in the name of all this brute and incapable part of the Creation. And he is here taught how to do it in these Words of the Psalmist, *whoso offers me Thanks and Praise, he Honours me, or he Glorifies me.*

By *Honour* or *Glory* here, I suppose is meant whatever comes within the Notion of Religious Service, or Divine Worship ; and when 'tis said, that he who offers God Thanks and Praise, he it is that Honours him ; I suppose 'tis spoken Emphatically, and by way of Eminence, importing as much as if 'twere said, He it is that Honours him more particularly, and performs a more special piece of Religious Service. So that from the Words I shall in the First place collect this Proposition, That the most principal and most acceptable part of Religion, consists in Praise and Thanksgiving.

Secondly, I shall consider what are the things we are concern'd chiefly to thank God for ; among which I shall particularly insist upon that Providential disposal of Men, in such outward Conditions and Circumstances of Life, as may be of  
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advantage to further their Eternal Interest.

Thirdly, I shall briefly represent to you, that the Circumstances of your Life are such.

Whence in the last place, I shall commend this Inference to your Consideration, that you are therefore highly obliged to the Duty of Praise and Thanksgiving.

The First thing to be spoken to is, that the most principal and most acceptable part of Religion, consists in Praise and Thanksgiving. I confess I am not very fond of making Comparisons between acts of Religion, being not ignorant of what Religion it self has suffered upon this very account, among a certain Generation of Men who set up one Duty of Religion against another, as *Preaching* against *Praying*. Nor should I do it here, but that I have for some time observed, that the Price of this Duty is generally *beaten down*, and the Duty it self but *seldom* and but *coldly* practised even among them who make Great account of all the rest, and are more particularly addicted to a Life of Piety and Devotion. The Parable of the Ten Lepers is a true Draught and Image of Mankind; all Ten Prayed, being under a great necessity to do so, but there was but One who bethought himself, and gave thanks. And so 'tis in the World, where to Ten that Pray, 'tis well if there be  
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One that gives Thanks; and even that One shall perhaps Pray ten times, before he gives thanks once: And when he does, it shan't be perhaps with half the Zeal and Affection wherewith he is wont to *Pray*; which procedure by the way, I know not how to resolve into any other Principle than this, that when we *Pray*, 'tis for our selves and our own Interest, to procure some good, or to avoid some evil; but when we give *Thanks* 'tis to God, and for God, without any Self-regard, as I shall further shew by and by. This I conceive is it that makes Men generally more frequent and more zealous in their Prayers than in their Praises. Whereas indeed the latter calls for greater Affection and Elevation of Spirit than the former, Praise being a greater glorification of God than Prayer, and indeed than any other Act of Religion.

This I might make appear from several grounds of Argument; but not to burthen my Discourse or your Patience with Unnecessaries, I shall confine my self to this single Consideration, That to Praise and give Thanks to God, is the most unselfish and disinterested act of Religion we can possibly honour him with, and consequently the most noble and generous of all. The Consequence I suppose will readily be acknowledged, that if it be really the most dis-interested

reſſed act of Religion, 'tis alſo the moſt noble and excellent ; for the leſs there is of *Self*, and the more there is of *God* in any Religious Performance, the more perfect 'tis allowed to be ; and though we do not with ſome, make it neceſſary to the goodneſs of an Action, that it be *unmercenary*, and done without any proſpect of Reward ; yet the Reaſon is, becauſe 'tis too high a mark for a mortal aim. We think it a Measure hardly Practicable by *any*, and therefore not neceſſary to *all* ; not denying in the mean while, but rather ſuppoſing, that if we could act by ſuch a Measure, it would be an higher and more noble Pitch of Virtue. Taking therefore the Argument for granted, I ſhall think my ſelf further concern'd only to juſtify the *Under-Propoſition*, by ſhewing that 'tis really the moſt diſ-interreſſed part of Religion.

Now that it is ſo, will be ſufficiently evident from this, that it reſpects the Benefits of God meerly as they are *paſt* ; it has indeed the Goodneſs of God for its Object, as well as many other acts of Religion, but with this Difference, that whereas other acts of Religion reſpect the Benefits of God as they are to *come*, this reſpects them as *paſt*, and conſequently, can have no Eye upon future Advantage. He indeed that gives Thanks may, but not as, and ſo far as he gives

gives thanks : It may be the End of the *Agent*, but not of the *Action*. For observe, though to give thanks for Blessings received be really a Means to procure more, as well as other Religious acts, yet there is this difference, that other acts are not only Means to Blessings, but may be used as such to that end, without destroying the nature of the acts themselves. But now Gratitude towards God, though it be really in it self, as much a Means in order to future Blessings, yet it can't be used and intended to that purpose, without so far undoing the very *Nature* as well as *Excellency* of the *Action* : For if I give Thanks meerly to get more, if that be my design, this is not Gratitude, but only another way of *Begging*, and so my Praising will indeed fall in and be confounded with Praying, which are supposed to be distinct. So that the very notion of Thanksgiving excludes all regard to Self-interest ; and what some highflown Theorists have asserted of Vertue in *general*, that it loses its very Being and Perfection, by being Mercenary or done upon motives of Interest is strictly true, of this *particular* Vertue, whose very Idea shuts out all respect to self-advantage.

The short is, this Vertue of Thankfulness, though it be conversant about the goodness and beneficialness of the Divine Nature,



which is also supposed to be actually exercised upon us, yet it does not respect it in order to our Interest, but as 'tis a Moral Perfection of the same Divine Nature, and so is rather an humble acknowledgment of something excellent in God, whose Perfections we adore and bear witness to, than an Address to him for something of advantage to our selves, which as I said before, its very Idea excludes, and cannot at all comport with.

But now this is more than can be said of any of the other acts of Religion; when we *Pray*, 'tis for the Relief of our Wants; our *Faith* leans upon some future Good, and our *Hope* is a comfortable expectation of it; and even *Charity* it self as it respects God, has a mixture of self-regard in it, I say, as far as it respects *God*. For it must be yielded (whatever some pretend to the contrary,) that there is some sort of Love which may be disinterested and pure from any selfish Principle, namely Love of *Benevolence*, whereby we may wish well and do well to our Neighbour purely for *his* Good, without projecting any Advantage to our selves. But then this is not that Love wherewith we love God, who is not capable of our *Benevolence*, but only of our *Desire*: For when we love God, we don't pretend to wish any good to him who is already possess'd of all; but only

ly wish him as a Good to our selves, which is the same as to desire him. Charity therefore as it respects God, is the same with desire of him, and all love of Desire is founded upon Indigence, and proceeds from Self-interest. So inconsistent and unprincipled is the Discourse of those who talk of Loving God purely for himself and his own absolute Perfections, without regarding our own advantage therein. We may indeed love our *Neighbour* so, but so we cannot love God; for to love God, is to desire him, to desire him as our Good and Happiness, and all love of Desire proceeds from *Want*, and ends in *Fullness*. And if Love it self must give the Precedency to Thanksgiving, I suppose none of the other acts of Religion will offer at a competition with it.

But you'll say, does not our Saviour call Love the First and the Great Commandment? To this I answer, that by Love, there is meant either Love of Benevolence, or Love of Desire; if Love of Benevolence, that is no immediate act of *Religion*, God not being capable of being so loved, as was urged before: And therefore we may allow this to be the principal Commandment, without any contradiction to the present Discourse which proceeds wholly concerning Acts of Religion. But if the love here spoken of, be love of *Desire*, than this is said to be

the First and the Great Commandment, not because it excells all the rest by its own *proper* value, but because it virtually contains, and is productive of them all, there being nothing so difficult or naturally displeasing which he that truly Loves, that is, *Desires* God, will refuse to do for his sake. And therefore 'tis, that in another place, Love is said to be the *fulfilling of the Law*, *Rom. 13. 10.* that is, virtually and potentially, as 'tis a general Mother Vertue, and the principle of a more particular and special Obedience. And in this respect indeed Love is the first and the great Commandment; but if we consider the proper dignity and excellence of the Action, he that *Praises* God Honours him more, and expresses himself more generously than he that *Loves* him. For he that Loves God, Loves him for his own good, in order to his Happiness and well-being; but he that Praises him (so far he does so,) does it not upon any self-end, but meerly because he thinks it just and equitable that a Creature should acknowledge and adore the Excellency of his Creator; which certainly is the *noblest* as well as the *justest* thing a Creature can do.

Indeed *Love* is the only Divine or Religious Vertue that can with any pretence vye with Praise and Thanksgiving; and accordingly 'tis observable, that of all the Vertu-  
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ous Acts and Habits that are now requisite to qualify a Man for Heaven, none shall be thought worthy to be retained in it, but only these Two, *Praise* and *Love*; all the rest shall be *super-annuated* and cease, as having no further occasion for their Exercise; these two only shall remain to be the entertainment of Angels and Angelical Spirits to all Eternity. //

But though Divine Love be equal with Praise as to this respect, in point of *Permanence* and Duration, yet in point of *Generosity* it comes far short of it; for indeed to speak properly, Love is no further excellent, than as it partakes of the nature of Praise; no further than as 'tis one way of acknowledging the Divine Perfections. For what commendation is it for me to Love what is my good, and makes for my Interest any otherwise than as by Loving, I acknowledge and bear witness to the excellency and amiableness of the Object beloved? That therefore which is excellent in Love, is not my *Coveting* the Divine Good, (which I do purely for my own Pleasure and Profit,) but by *bearing witness* to it. And yet even here Praise will have the Preeminence, because this acknowledges the Divine Perfections *Directly* and *Expressly*, which the other does only *Implicitly* and by *Consequence*. So that in every respect, Praise and Thanksgiving will



will be found to be the greatest Honour and Glorification of God, which sufficiently establishes the Proposition laid down, That the most principal and most acceptable part of Religion consists in Praise and Thanksgiving.

And here before I go any further, give me leave by the way, First to deplore the general defect of our common Closet-Devotions; Secondly, To commend the excellent Constitution of our Publick Liturgy. As to the First, 'tis a sad thing to consider, that so Divine and so Angelical a Service as that of Praise and Thanksgiving, which is so highly preferred in the Sacred Writings, and which the Man after God's own Heart was so very eminent and remarkable for, the Burthen of whose Devotion lay in *Anthems* and *Allelujahs*, should be so neglected and so little regarded as it is; That that which is so much the employment and business of *Heaven*, should be so little valued upon *Earth*; and what the *Angels* esteem so Divine a Service, should have so little share in the Devotions of *Men*. There are but few even of the Devouter sort, that are duly sensible of the excellency of Praise, and those that have a considerable sense of it, are generally very backward to the Duty, and very cold in the Performance. Our Necessities often call us to our *Prayers*, and supply  
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us with Devotion in them ; but as for *Praise*, it seems a dead and heartless Service, and we care not how seldom or how indifferently it be performed. Which common Backwardness of ours, the Scripture also supposes by its earnest and frequent Exhortations to this Duty.

But the *Church of England* (to her great Commendation be it spoken,) proceeds by another Measure in her Devotions, enjoining *Praise* as largely and as frequently as *Prayer* ; she has taken her Copy from the Man after God's own Heart ; and as *Hosannah* and *Allelujah*, Prayer unto God, and Praises of God, divide the whole Book of Psalms, so do they her Liturgy, which is a Service of *Praise*, as well as of *Prayer*. This the Church admonishes us of, in the very Preface and Entrance of her excellent Service, telling us, that we *Assemble and Meet together, to render Thanks for the great Benefits that we have received at God's hands, and to set forth his most worthy Praise*. Then the Priest, *Praise ye the Lord* ; to which the People, *The Lord's Name be Praised*. And this is done in all our Hymns, as the *Venite, O come let us Sing unto the Lord, &c.* And in that noble Hymn called the *Te Deum*, *We Praise thee O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord*. Thus again in the *Benedictus*, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, &c.* where we  
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bleſs God for the Redemption of the World by Chriſt ; which alſo we do in the *Jubilate*, and in the Bleſſed Virgins *Magnificat*, *My Soul does magnify the Lord*, &c. So again in the *Cantate Domino*, and the *Nunc Dimittis*, and *Deus Miſeratur*, *Let the People praife thee O God, let all the People praife thee*. Beſides the *Gloria Patri*, and many particular Offices of Thankſgiving, and the whole *Pſalter of David*, which is a conſiderable part of the Church Service. So truly ſenſible was the Wiſdom of our excellent Mother, both of the great worth and importance of this Duty of Praiſe, and of the general Backwardneſs and Coldneſs of Men in applying themſelves to it.

But I proceed now in the Second place, to conſider what are the things we are chiefly concerned to Praiſe and Thank God for. Theſe in general are thoſe things which relate to our Spiritual Concern, and our grand Intereſt in another World ; for the ſame general Order is to be obſerved both in our Prayers and in our Praiſes ; and as we are chiefly to *Pray* for Spiritual Bleſſings, ſo 'tis for them that we are chiefly to return *Thanks*. More particularly we are concerned to thank God (as the Wiſdom of our excellent Church directs us,) for his inſtimable Love in the Redemption of the World by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, for the means of Grace,  
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and for the hopes of Glory. And among these means of Grace, I think we are not in the last place concerned to thank him for disposing us in such outward circumstances of Life as are advantagious to our Salvation, it being hardly imaginable how much the diversity of these contributes to our Living well or ill. How many Persons of excellent Dispositions, of great Attainments, and of greater Hopes, have we known to be utterly spoiled and ruined, meerly by falling into Ill hands ; as we have it recorded of the young Disciple of St. John, in *Ecclesiastick Story* ? And so again on the other hand, how many Persons of Vicious Inclinations, and more Vicious Lives, have been diverted out of the Road of Destruction, meerly by some accidental Occurrence, some little Providential hit that happened to cross their way ! //

There is an *Ingenious Gentleman* of considerable Character and Figure in the Learned World, who makes that Grace of God whereby he conducts Men to Holiness and Happiness, to be nothing else but only a happy train or disposition of external Circumstances and Occurrences. As suppose a Man falls into some very sharp Affliction, which works him into a softness and tenderness of Mind ; while he is under this sensible and pliant disposition, he happens to meet with //



with a good Book, which strikes upon the same String of his Soul ; after this, he lights into good Company, where the former Disposition receives a new and further improvement ; and so on in a train of Accidents, the latter still renewing the Impression of the former, till at length the Man is perfectly brought over to a new Order and Habit both of Mind and Life.

Now though for several weighty Reasons, too many to be here alledged, I cannot be of this Gentleman's Mind, so far as to make the Divine Grace (which in Scripture is frequently ascribed to the Holy Spirit of God working within us,) to be nothing else but a course of well-laid Circumstances ; yet I may and must needs say, that I think the outward Circumstances of Life, have a very great stroak upon the moral conduct of it, and that the *success* of inward Grace does very much depend upon outward Occurrences. For not to argue from the different manner of *Education* upon which the quality of our future life does generally as much depend, as the fortune of the *Soul* does upon its delivery out of the Hand, 'tis common and easie to observe, that some Men are engaged in such unhappy Circumstances, as do almost necessitate them to be Vicious ; while others again are so advantageously placed, as if God had laid a *Plot* for their Salvation.

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The ground of this unequal Dispensation, 'tis neither easie nor at present *necessary* to account for, and I believe we may put it among those Difficulties whose Solution is reserved to the Coming of *Elias*, as the *Jews* // love to speak of all desperate Problems. In the mean time however, this is certain, that those who are distinguished from the Multitude by such advantagious Circumstances, have great reason to bless God for making the *work* of their Salvation so *Easie*, and the *Issue* of it so *Secure*, for thus disposing them, and setting them in order for Eternal Life. For however the glory of doing well be in-  
hanced by circumstances of disadvantage, as 'tis spoken to the credit of the Church of *Per- gamos*, that she held fast the Faith even where Satan's Seat was; *Rev. 2. 13.* yet of such vast moment is the business of our Salvation, that a Wise Considering Man would prefer such Circumstances as add rather to the *Security*, than to the *Weight* of his Crown. 'Tis too great a stake to be hazarded for the glory of a greater Excellence, whether of Vertue or of Reward; and therefore though a Life of *Temptation* may possibly serve to that, yet our Saviour in consideration of our state and danger, has taught us to Pray that we may not enter into it.

And for the same reason that we *deprecate* such circumstances of Life as are apt to *hinder*;

*der*, we are concerned to *Pray* for such as are apt to *further* us in the way of our Salvation ; and our Saviour could intend no less, by his *Lead us not into Temptation*, than that we should pray that God would lead us into such circumstances of Living, as may not only be no hindrance, but an advantage and furtherance to our Salvation. And if it concerns us to *Pray* for such, then also to give *Thanks* for them. We ought indeed to Bless God for every thing that contributes never so little to so great an End, much more for disposing us in such a state and way of Life, where we have few Temptations but to do well, and are as it were under a *Course* of Salvation.

And this (my Brethren,) I take to be very much your Case, and that the circumstances of your Life are in a great measure such as I have now described ; for not to mention your grand, though common Privilege of Christianity, which divides you from above half the World, and your more peculiar Privilege of being Members of a Reformed Church, and that too the Best of those which are Reformed, where there is such excellent Provision made for all the Purposes of a Christian Life ; where you have not only all the *Substantials* of Christian Religion, but those also most excellently Ordered and Disposed according to the best

best measures of Human Wisdom ; particularly where you have such an excellent Liturgy, so Wisely and so Divinely Composed, as might be used even by the Angels in Heaven, were there any need of Praying there ; I say, not to insist upon these things, I shall proceed to what is more Personal and Peculiar, and briefly represent to you the advantageousness of your present Circumstances upon these Two Considerations.

First, That you here enjoy all the Advantages of Serving God in the way of a *Contemplative* Life.

Secondly, That you here enjoy also all the Advantages of fitting and qualifying yourselves to serve both him and the Publick, in an *Active* Life, whenever you shall be called to it.

And First, as to a *Contemplative* Life ; This is immediately and properly a Life of Religion and Devotion, and absolutely considered, is the most perfect of any : This the School-Men and Mystical Divines commonly represent under the Figure of *Martha* and *Mary*, the former of which they suppose to be the Picture of an *Active* Life, and the latter of a *Contemplative* And whereas *Mary* is said to have chosen the *Better part*, this they think a Warrant to give the preference to a *Contemplative* Life. Whether it be or no, I will not dispute, but I think the pre-

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ference it self is just, and that a Contemplative Life absolutely considered, has the greater Perfection. For though there be great excellency in an Active Life, yet 'tis meerly with relation to the present Exigence; and though the Habit of Charity shall (as the Apostle discourses, 1 Cor. 13. 8.) remain for ever; yet these present instances and expresses of it are calculated purely for this Life, and shall utterly cease in the next. But now the *Contemplative* Life is to last for ever, and to be the Entertainment of that state where there is nothing but meer Excellence, where all that is imperfect shall be done away.

And this is that Life which your present circumstances doth invite you to, and further you in; here your *Thoughts* are your own, and so is your *Time* too wherein to employ them; here you live a Life free and dis-ingaged from all worldly Incumbrances and Secular Avocations, and blest with all possible Advantages for a Contemplative and Affectionate Religion: Here you have Solitude, Retirement, and Leisure, and so may serve God without *Distraction*, and without *Disturbance*. And you can hardly well imagin till you have tried it, of how great advantage this last thing is to a Devotional Life. *He that has little Business shall be Wise,* says he that was so: I may add, and shall be

be good too. Leisure is a great Friend to Meditation, and that to Religion. But Business is an Enemy to both; for believe me, 'tis very hard to keep up the Spirit of Devotion in Multiplicity of Affairs. He that is thus troubled about many things, is not in the way of *Extraordinary* Religion: 'Tis well if such a one can mind the One thing necessary, and discharge the Offices of Common Life. But this is not your Case, you have Time, and you have Leisure in abundance; you have little else to do, but to trim your Lamps, to adorn your *Intérieur*, and to perfect Holiness in the Fear of God. In short, your very Profession is to be *Religious*; you live in a place where the Order of the Morning and Evening Sacrifice is duly observed, where you have stated Hours of Prayer and Thanksgiving to serve God in *Publick*, and all the *rest* of your Time is one continued Opportunity of Serving him in *Private*. So that you may be said, considering the Advantageousness of your Circumstances, to be in the very Emphasis of the Phrase, *παρακαταστήσασθε ἑαυτοὺς ᾧ κυρίῳ*, to stand in order, and rightly disposed for Heaven, and your whole Life may be properly called a *Day* of Salvation.

And as you here enjoy all the Advantages of serving God in the way of a *Contemplative* Life, so Secondly, you have here also all

the Advantages of fitting your selves to serve both him and the Publick in an *Active* Life whenever you shall be called to it: For besides, that what makes you Good and Religious here, serves also to make you useful and serviceable hereafter, a Pious and a Well-principled Education being the best Preparative for a Life of Publick Action and Employment ; besides this, you have all the Advantages of Learning that *Books* and *Conversation*, and *Leisure* to make the best use and improvement of both can possibly afford: So that there is no Employment or Profession either in Church or State, either Spiritual or Secular, but what you have here the best Helps and Advantages to fit your selves for.

And now since there is so much Excellency in Praise and Thanksgiving, and since we are particularly obliged to Bless God for Advantagious Circumstances of Life ; and since the Circumstances of your present Life appear to be eminently such, let me in the last place commend this to your serious Consideration, Whether you are not therefore highly obliged to the Duty of Praise and Thanksgiving.

Certainly if any Persons in the World are, you are, who are best qualified to understand the transcendent excellency of it, and also lie under the greatest Obligations and Inducements to it : Indeed you can never  
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enough Bless God for the Happy Opportunities of Religion you enjoy in this Place, where you are like the *Trees planted by the Water side*, *Psal. 1. 3.* in a growing and thriving Situation, (as the Psalmist elegantly describes the condition of this Happy Man,) and where it must be your own intolerable fault, if like him, you bring not forth your *Fruit in due Season*. Particularly you ought to Bless God for that Happy Instrument of these great Advantages, whose dear Memory we this Day *Justly*, and I hope *Gratefully* Celebrate.

And after a grateful Sense, and hearty Acknowledgment of these kind Dispensations, your next care should be to make such good *use* and improvement of them all, as may answer both the natural tendency of the Privileges themselves, and the good Ends and Designs of God and your *Pious Founder*; always remembering, that if (as the Author to the *Hebrews* tells us, *Heb. 2. 3.*) they shall not escape who neglect the common Advantages of the Christian Institution, which was so much beyond whatever the World enjoyed before, much less shall we if we neglect *so great Salvation*, so great an Advantage and Opportunity of being Saved.



The Importance of a Religious  
Life considered from the happy  
Conclusion of it.

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*Psal. 37. 38. Keep Innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right ; for that shall bring a Man Peace at the Last.*

**T**IS the great difference between a Life of Sin and Wickedness, and a Life of Piety and Vertue, that the former consults only the *present* Interest, but the latter provides for our *future* well-being, and lays a sure Foundation for our everlasting Peace and Happiness. The greatest advantage we can possibly promise our selves from a sinful course, can be at most but to be diverted a little, and pleasantly entertained for our term of Life here, which besides the uncertainty of it, is at longest very short and transitory : Short indeed, if compared to other temporary things in the Vegetable or Sensitive World, to the Life of an Oak or an Elephant ; but a meer *nothing*, if ballanced with

with the Days of Eternity : Time it self has no Proportion to Eternity, much less that Span of it that makes the Life of Man, *Psal.* 39. *Behold thou hast made my Days as a Span long, and mine Age is even as nothing in respect of thee,* says the Psalmist ; so that were our whole Life one continued and intire Scene of Pleasure, nothing but meer Sensuality and Epicurism, 'twould be but just nothing in respect of that long part which we are to act upon another Stage. Indeed such a degree of Pleasantness would serve to make it yet much shorter, and contract the *Span* into a *Point*. And yet this is the most that a life of Sin can possibly pretend to, (for it lays claim to nothing beyond the Grave but Misery and Destruction) and when once the little Span is measured out, all that we can then say of it, upon a review, will be to the sense of that severe Remark of the Stoick, Ἡ μὲν ἡδονὴ παρῆλθεν τὸ δὲ κακὸν μένει, *The Pleasure truly is past and gone, but the Evil remains* ; which is a most deplorable and afflicting Consideration.

But I speak this only upon *Supposition* ; for indeed the Sinner is seldom or never so fortunate as this comes to ; his whole Life is but a Point, a little Speck between Time and Eternity, and yet 'tis not the thousandth part of it that he enjoys. The more usual method of Sin, is to mix and change the

Scenes, to regale us with a short Entertainment, and then to serve up to us in the close of the Feast a *Deaths Head* ; to divert us a while with Pleasure. and when that's over, to make us pay dearly for it ; to afflict us with a sharp and perhaps long Repentance. Indeed a bad Conscience is a Companion troublesom enough even in the midst of the most high-set Enjoyments ; 'tis then like the *Hand writing* upon the Wall, enough to spoil and disrelish the *Feast* ; but much more when the tumult and hurry of Delight is over, when all is still and silent, when the Sinner has nothing to do, but attend to its lashes and remorses. And this in spite of all the common Arts of Diversion, will be very often the case of every wicked Man ; for we cannot live always upon the *Stretch* ; our Faculties will not bear constant Pleasure any more than constant Pain ; there will be some *Vacancies*, and when there are, they will be sure to be filled up with uncomfortable Thoughts and black Reflections : So that when the Accounts of a Sinful Life are cast up, this will be found to be the Sum of it, a little present gratification at the expence of a deal of succeeding Trouble, Shame and Self-condemnation ; nothing but present Joys and those too frequently *interrupted*, and always *overcharged*. So that setting aside the great *After-reckoning*, its Pleasures  
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are over-bought even in this World, and there is this great Aggravation of the Folly of Sin, that although some of its Pains are Eternal, yet all its Pleasures are but for a Season.

But now its quite otherwise in the practice of Religion and Vertue: This makes Provision for our Best and Last Interest, and secures to us a Reversion of never Failing and never ending Happiness. Indeed she is not destitute even of a *Present* Reward, but carries in hand a sufficient Recompence for all the trouble she occasions. She is pleasant in the *Way* as well as in the *End*, for even her very Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace. But 'tis her greatest and most distinguishing Glory and Commendation, that she befriends us *Hereafter*, and brings us Peace at the last. And this is a Portion she can never be dis-inherited of, however the Malice of Men, or an ill Combination of Accidents may defraud her of the Other. And therefore the Psalmist Over-looking as it were all the intermedial advantages of a good Life, recommends it only from that which is proper and peculiar to it. For Vice has its Present Pleasures as well as Vertue; but herein are they discriminated, that 'tis Vertue only that ends well. I myself (says the Psalmist) have seen the ungodly in great Power, flourishing like a green



green Bay-Tree : There's the present Pomp and Triumph of Sin. But I went by, and lo he was gone ; I sought him, but his place could no where be found : There's the unhappy Close of the Merry Comedy. Then it follows as a Practical Remark from the whole : Keep Innocency, and take heed to the thing that is Right, for that shall bring a Man Peace at the last.

The Words are Naturally resolvable into these three Considerations, which shall be made the Subject of the following Discourse.

1. That Peace at the last is more to be valued than any of the Temporary Pleasures of Sin.

2. That a good Life, which the Psalmist here expresses, by keeping Innocency, and taking heed to the thing that is Right, will certainly bring a Man this Peace at the last.

3. That therefore it highly concerns every Man to keep Innocency, and to take heed to the thing that is Right ; in one word, to *Live well*.

The Sum and Force of the whole may be reduced in this practical Syllogism.

That which will bring a Man Peace at the last, is to be chiefly minded, and most diligently heeded.

But a Life of Piety and Vertue will bring a Man Peace at the Last.

Therefore a Life of Piety and Vertue is  
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to be chiefly minded, and most diligently heeded.

I begin with the first Consideration, That Peace at the last is more to be valued than any of the Temporary Pleasures of Sin. Now this Term, *at the last*, may be taken Two ways, either for the last and concluding Period of a Man's Life in this World, and then Peace at the last will be all one with Peace at the Hour of Death ; or else for the last and unchangeable State of Man in the other World, and then Peace at the last will be the same with *Everlasting Peace*. I shall consider the Proposition with respect to both these Senses : And First, for Peace at the Hour of Death ; The inestimable value of which, though none are so well able to judge of, as they who are really and actually concern'd in that dreadful moment, yet we may take some measures of it, by considering a little what it is to *Dye*, and how miserable is the condition of those who have lived so ill as to *want* this Peace at the Hour of Death.

And First let us consider (that which I fear we seldom do) what it is to *Dye* : Death is a thing of a strange and dreadful consideration, dreadful in *it self*, as 'tis a Dissolution of Nature, the manner of which, because we do not *know*, we mightily *fear* ; but much more so in its Issue and Consequence, which

which is both *great* and *doubtful*, for upon this one thing more depends, than upon all the things in the World besides. Indeed the loss of Life and the Pains and Agonies wherewith it is lost, are the least part of Death. This indeed is the whole of it to brute and irrational Creatures, they suffer Pain for a while, then resign up their Breath, and lose both the Sense and the Remembrance of both Pain and Pleasure. But to the Dying *Man* Death appears in another Light, and with another Face : He is further to consider, that he is just now launching out into the fathomless Deep of Eternity ; that he is entering upon a new, strange, dark, and withal unalterable state of things ; that he shall be within some few Minutes what at present he has no manner of Notion of, and what he must be for ever ; that he is now about to throw his last and great Cast, and to be resolved once for all of his whole Condition ; that he is now passing from Time to Eternity, Eternity of Happiness, or Eternity of Misery.

And what a dreadful moment then must that be, which a little precedes this great Transaction, when a Man stands upon the very *edge* and brink of the Precipice, just upon the turning off, and has the great Gulph of Eternity in view ! Nothing certainly can be more dreadful than this, except

cept that very Point, that narrow Horizon that divides Time from Eternity, the end of the former, and the beginning of the latter, and actually determines the business of our Happiness or Damnation.

And now since to Dye is no less a thing in its consequence, than to be either Damned or Saved, to be either Eternally Happy, or Eternally Miserable, it cannot sure but be matter of vast importance to a Man, to consider which of these two is like to be his Lot, when he is just about to try one of them. Nay indeed, 'twill then nearly concern him to be pretty well assured of the *welfare* of his After-state; then if ever, he will rightly understand the inestimable Price of a quiet Conscience, of a satisfied Mind, and of a Hope full of Glory and Immortality; then if ever, he will find that which was always a *Continual Feast*, is now a Sovereign Cordial and the Food of Angels; for never certainly is Peace and Comfort more seasonable than at this Instant; never so much need of it, and never so much value to be set upon it; never can it more avail us to be satisfied concerning our final condition, than when we are just entring upon it; never more refreshing to have some few Beams of Light, than when we are passing through the *dark Valley* and *shadow of Death*. Then therefore, if ever, we shall duly value this  
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rich Pearl, a good Conscience, and be well content if we had parted with all our Substance for the Purchase of it. We shall then be fully convinced (O why are we not so now ! ) how much it outweighs all the Temporary Pleasures of Sin, yea, and the Severities of Vertue too ; and that if our whole Life had been one continued act of Penance and Austerity, 'twould have been abundantly recompensed by the Satisfaction and Consolation of this one Moment. And that 'tis worth while to live Rigidly, if 'twere only upon this one Consideration, that we may Dye Chearfully.

And without Question it must needs be an unspeakable Satisfaction to a Dying Man, when if he looks *backward*, he sees a Life well spent ; if *forward*, he has before him a bright Prospect of Light and Glory : When he can say with King *Hezekiah*, *Remember now O Lord I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in Truth and with a Perfect Heart ; Isa. 38.* and with the great Apostle when within view of his Dissolution, *2 Tim. 4. I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give me at that day.* I say it must needs be an unspeakable, an unconceivable Satisfaction, for a Man in his last Hour, when he is tak-  
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ing leave of his Body, and shaking Hands with the whole World, when all are sad about him, and concerned for him, then to consider that there is a better state, and that he has a Title to it ; that when his Earthly Tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a Building with God, an House not made with Hands, Eternal in the Heavens : That when he shall cease to live with Men, he shall dwell with God, and converse with Angels ; in a word, that he is to leave nothing but Vanities and Shadows behind him, and that he has the solid and real Happiness of a whole Eternity before him. What a mild and unterrifying thing is Death to such a Man as this, and with what Serenity and Chearfulness does he entertain its Summons ! He can smile in the Physicians Face, when he hears him pronounce his Sicknes desperate, can receive the Sentence of Death without Trembling, and if his Senses hold out so long, can hear even his Passing-Bell without disturbance. The Warnings of Death are no more to him, than was the Voice of God to *Moses*, when he said to him, *Get thee up to Mount Nebo and dye there ; Deut. 32.* no more but get thee up and Dye. For now he feels the approaches of that Salvation with Joy, which he had before wrought out with Fear and Trembling, and can lay down his Body with an holy Hope, having possessed

fed it in Sanctification and Honour. And what a happy state of Mind is this! How far exceeding all the common objects of Desire and Envy, and all those Pleasures of Sin, for whose sake 'tis yet frequently put to the *Hazard*, and too often foolishly *exchanged*! To *Live* with Peace of Conscience is a singular Happiness, but much more to *Dye* with it; then, if ever, 'tis a Peace that passes all Understanding. So great reason had *Balaam* for that passionate Wish of his, *Let me dye the Death of the Righteous, and let my last End be like his.*

But this we shall be further convinc'd of, by considering Secondly, the miserable condition of those who want this Peace at the Hour of Death: This may be conceived in a double degree, either by way of *Doubt* or *Distrust*, or by way of down-right *Despair*. Suppose we then in the First place, a Man placed upon his Death-Bed, who has led his Life so indifferently, or Repented so lately, or so imperfectly, that 'tis a matter of reasonable question, whether he has an interest in the Mercies of the New Covenant or no; what a strange kind of *Suspense* must such a Man be in, and what a strange concern must he have upon him! What a disconsolate, what a *damping* Thought must it be for such a Man to consider that he is now going out of the World, but does not know whither!

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That there are Two States of Eternity, but he does not know which shall fall to his lot; nor, when his Soul is dislodged from his Body, who shall give her the first greeting, whether an *Angel* or the *Devil*. And how must such an uncertain Soul tremble and be confounded in this her *dark Passage*! 'Tis a sad thing even to be Doubtful and Unresolved in a business of such vast moment.

But if the Man by reason of the notorious enormity of his Life, is so far a Stranger to this Peace, as to be in utter *Despair* of his Salvation, I want words to express how miserable then his Condition is; with what amazement then will he look, both backward and forward upon his Sins, and upon his approaching Account, and how full of Indignation will he be against himself for neglecting, when he had so many Opportunities, to consider the things that belonged to his Peace, and which now he perceives to be for ever hid from his Eyes! The *Memory* of a Sinful Life is always tormenting, whatever Pleasure there may be in the *acts* of it, and the expectation of Judgment is always terrible; but never do either of them appear in their true Colours, till a Man comes to Dye: Then he begins to have a sense and apprehension of them, somewhat like that which our Saviour had in the Garden, which put him into an *Agony*, and a *Sweat*

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of *Blood*. When the Man comes within view of *Eternity*, then will he be most concerned for his misuse of *Time*. The Scripture compares a wicked Man to a *Troubled Sea*, always working and uneasy, but about the time of Death he is all over Storm and Tempest. Who can then *express* the hundredth part of the Disturbance and Confusion he then *feels*? For a Man to think he is just going to give an account before God of such a Life as he can't so much as reflect upon privately by himself without Shame and Amazement, and to be sentenced to a place of Torment, from whence there is no Redemption; to think that he has lived Insignificantly and Wickedly, Idly and Unaccountably, and neglected that only time of Probation, that only Opportunity of Happiness allowed him, an Opportunity which was procured him at no less a rate than the Death of his Saviour, and which was denied to the Angels that Sinned: To think that he has neglected so great Salvation, and that he must now be miserable and undone for ever, when with ease he might have been Happy, and all this for the sake of some little trifling Interests or Pleasures, for Dreams and Shadows, for that which never was considerable, and now is not at all: What can be more afflicting, more astonishing than this? For my part I think the Misery on't so great, that I  
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can't see how any Man could support himself under the Agony of such a Consideration, no, not though an Angel should appear to him from Heaven, strengthening him : For 'tis a state of Mind full of the very *Blackness* of Darkeness, and but one Remove from the Misery of Damnation.

And now I think from this Description of Horreur, it may with ease be gathered, what an invaluable Blessing and Happiness it is to have Peace at the last, I mean at our last Hour. If there be any one that is not yet enough satisfied of it, let him but ask a Dying Man the Question, and then remain an Infidel if he can.

I should now consider Peace at the last, as it signifies *E. everlasting Peace*, or the Peace of the last and unchangeable state of Man in the other World, and shew how far this is to be valued beyond all the Temporary Pleasures of Sin : But this is that Peace of God which passes all Understanding, all Conception, and all Expression, and between which and any thing of this World, there is no manner of Proportion. What the Apostle says of the *Sufferings*, is as true of the *Pleasures* and Enjoyments of this present time, that are neither of them worthy to be compared with the Glory that shall be revealed : Not worthy to be compared for their *Greatness*, and less for their *Duration*. I may

therefore well omit any further enlarging upon this, 'twould be almost as ridiculous to go about to give Light to a thing that is of it self so clear, as 'tis to disbelieve it; and he that offers to make the least Question of so evident a Truth, is much too absurd to be seriously argued with.

I shall therefore pass on to the Second Consideration, that a good Life which the Psalmist here expresses, by keeping Innocency, and taking heed to the thing that is Right, will certainly bring a Man this Peace at the last. And First, 'twill bring him *Everlasting Peace*; this is plain from the whole tenour of the New Covenant, which establishes a standing and never failing connexion between *Repentance* and *Pardon*. 'Tis the very Purchase of Christ's Death, that now Repentance may be unto Life; and accordingly 'tis not only matter of Hope and probable Expectation, but 'tis made one of the *Articles* of our *Creed*, that we may obtain *Forgiveness of Sins*. Indeed, Repentance is now no where in vain, but among Devils and Damned Spirits; it would have been so with us too, had not Christ dyed, and satisfied the Curse of the Law, and the Justice of the Lawgiver, and upon that satisfaction erected a New Covenant. For the Law knows no such thing as Repentance, but the Soul that sinneth must Dye,  
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Penitent or Impenitent. But 'tis the benefit we have by the satisfaction of Christ, that now if we Repent, we shall be forgiven and accepted with God to Salvation and Happiness. We shall certainly be saved with it, and not without it ; for Christ did not (as some fancy,) so far undertake for us, that we might not Repent and Live well, but that we might Repent to *Purpose*. He did not design to make our Repentance unnecessary, but only to render it useful and efficacious to the ends of Pardon and Reconciliation : So that a good Life is not only the means, but the *only* possible means to everlasting Peace and Happiness.

As it is Secondly, to bring us Peace at the Hour of Death, nothing else can do it but this, and this can, and most certainly will ; as a good Life gives us a firm Title to Salvation and Happiness, so will it give us a good comfortable Assurance of that Title which is always an unspeakable Peace and Satisfaction, but especially at the approach of Death. And this is the natural Consequence and Reward of a Life well spent ; a good Man *does* his Duty with great Pleasure and Satisfaction, but he *reflects* upon it with greater ; his *Present* Joys are very savoury and refreshing, but his *After-Comforts* are much more so. But of all the Reviews of his Life, none yields him so much Comfort



and Satisfaction, as that last general Review which he takes of it, when he comes to Dye ; then he has most need of Comfort, then he is most fit to relish it, and then he has most of it. With what strange Delight and Satisfaction does he then reflect upon his past Life, and call to mind the good he has done in it ! Those Joys and Consolations which before maintained a gentle course within their own Channels, now begin to swell above their Banks and *overflow* the Man. A kind of Heavenly Light springs up in his Mind, and shines forth into his Face, and his Hopes and his Desires, his Thoughts and his Affections, his Presages and his Expectations, his Body and his Soul ; yea, the whole Man is full of Glory and Immortality ; he is conscious to himself of his Sincerity and Integrity, that he has not been wilfully and deliberately wanting in any part of his Duty, but has rather made this his *Exercise* and constant Concern, to keep a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man. And as he *recollects* this with *Pleasure*, so he builds upon it with *Confidence*, and accordingly resigns up his Soul into his Maker's Hands, cheerfully and courageously, nothing doubting, but that that good God whom he has so faithfully served in his Life, will take care of him, and reward him after Death.

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And for such an Assurance as this, there is sufficient ground in Scripture : *Psal. 119. Great is the Peace that they have who love thy Law, says the Psalmist : And the Righteous hath Hope in his Death, says Solomon, Prov. 14. 32. And says the Prophet, Isa. 32. 17 The work of Righteousness shall be Peace, and the effect of Righteousness Quietness and Assurance for ever. And says the great Apostle, 2 Cor. 1. 12. Our Rejoycing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and Godly Sincerity, we have had our Conversation in the World, 1 John 3. 14. And we know that we have passed from Death to Life, because we love the Brethren, says St. John. And again, ver. 21. If our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God.*

There is indeed some Controversie between the *Reformed* and the *Romish* Doctors concerning this Matter, the latter generally denying that a Man may be Assured or Certain of his Salvation ; now though it may and perhaps must be granted, that we cannot have an Assurance of *Divine Faith*, (nothing being the Object of such an Assurance, but for which we have an immediate Revelation from God, which cannot ordinarily be said of any Man's Salvation in particular, but only of the general and conditional Proposition of the Covenant upon

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which we build,) yet I think there is sufficient reason to conclude from the forementioned places of Scripture, with many others too numerous and obvious to alledg, that a Man upon the consideration of his past Life, may be so *Morally* assured of his Salvation, as to be out of all reasonable Doubt or Irresolution about it; and he that will deny this, must oblige himself to maintain one of these Two Propositions, either that a Man cannot understand what conditions are required of him in order to a Salvable State, or that he can't with any measure of Certainty, judge of himself whether he be qualified according to those Conditions. The former of which, would reflect upon the *Sufficiency* and *Clearness* of Scripture, which must be allowed to be full and plain in necessary things; and the latter would redound too much to the dishonour and disparagement of Human Reason and Understanding; since according to this Proposition a Man must be supposed to be so great a Stranger to himself, as not to know what passes within his own Breast, contrary to which the Scripture supposes in that Question, 1 Cor. 2. 11. *Who knows the things of a Man, save the Spirit of Man which is in him?*

It must be acknowledged, that this is not a strict Certainty, neither of *Science* nor of *Divine Faith*, but only a Moral and Human Assurance;

Assurance; for 'tis certain, that the Conclusion can be no stronger than the Premises: And therefore since one of the Propositions (that which contains my own Qualifications,) is matter only of Experimental Knowledge, which is a Human, and therefore fallible Testimony, 'tis certain, that the Assurance that rises from the whole, can be no more than an Human or Moral Assurance. But that is enough, and he is neither Reasonable nor Modest that either *Desires* or *Pretends* to more; since the other is sufficient for a *Satisfactory*, though not for an *Infallible* Judgment.

And yet there is something further in this matter yet; for to this Moral Assurance grounded upon the general Terms of Salvation, (which are matter of Divine Faith,) and upon the inward Consciousness of our being qualified accordingly, (which is matter of Experimental Knowledge,) we may further add, that *Obsignation* so often mentioned in Scripture, *Rom. 8. 16.* whereby the Spirit it self is said to bear Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God; not by a clear and express Revelation, (for then the Assurance we have of our Salvation, would be an Assurance of Divine Faith, which is against what was before supposed,) but only by a secret Determination of our Minds to assent to this Comfortable Conclusion,



sion, that we are in a state of Pardon and Salvation, and by Confirming us in that Assent. After what manner this Operation of God is performed, I shall not be so curious as to inquire, 'tis enough to know that it is a certain impresson of the Holy Spirit upon our Souls, whereby we are inwardly persuaded beyond the force of Rational Conviction of our being interess'd in the Divine Favour, and in the Glory that shall be revealed. This is the *Seal of the Spirit*, *Ephes. 1. 13, 14.* and the *Pledge or Earnest* of our *Inheritance*, which God often bestows upon the Children of Light in this Life, as a Reward for their past, and sometimes as an encouragement for their future Obedience. For so says the Spirit to the Churches, *Rev. 2. 17. To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the hidden Manna, and I will give him a white Stone, and in the Stone a new Name written, which no Man knows, saving he that receives it.*

And now since Peace at the last is so valuable a Treasure, and since a good Life is a certain and the only way to obtain it, what Consequence can be more natural and evident from these Premises than that it highly concerns us to keep Innocency, and to take heed to the thing that is right; in one word, to Live well, which was the Third and last Consideration. Indeed were Peace at the last, a thing of no great value, or were not

a good Life a sure and a necessary method to obtain it ; were there a failure in either of these Premises, the Conclusion would fail with it, and 'twere no great matter how we Lived. But since the quite contrary appears to be unquestionably true, that Peace at the last is incomparably beyond any Temporal Interest we can propose, and a good Life is a sure and necessary way to procure it ; nothing certainly in the World can be of such moment and consequence, as to live well ; 'Tis by infinite degrees the most important thing that can possibly imploy our Thoughts, or our Time, our Studies or our Endeavours, nay indeed 'tis the *One thing needful*. Vain and impertinent are all those other *many things* we are here troubled about, all those Thoughts and Cares we have about Time, and the things of Time, which indeed would be of little value, even to a Temporary Being, much more to an Immortal Spirit who is to live in another State, and there either enjoy or suffer to all Eternity. To such a Being Time certainly can be no further considerable, than as Eternity depends upon it, no further than as it may serve as an Opportunity to secure the other ; which is all the *use* and all the *value* Time and this Mortal Life can have with a wise and considering Man. The best use therefore we can make of our Time, is to live well in it,

to spend it Innocently and Usefully, Piously and Charitably in the Service of God, and in doing good to Men. 'Tis for this we have our Time, and this is the right and proper use of it, and that which will give the most Happy Conclusion to it. This is that which will yield us Peace and Comfort, when nothing else can, and when we stand in most need of it, in the *Hour of Death*, and in the *Day of Judgment*, in either of which there is no comfort like a good Conscience.

When I shall lie faint and languishing upon my Dying Bed, with my Friends all sad about me, and my Blood and Spirits waxing cold and slow within; when I begin to reckon my Life not by the Striking of the Clock, but by the throbbings of my Pulse, every stroke of which beats a *Surrender* to the Pale Conqueror, in this great *Ebb* of Nature, when the Stream of Life runs low, *Eccles. 12. 6.* and the Wheel at the *Cistern* can hardly turn round its Circle, it will be then no Pleasure or Comfort to my departing Soul to reflect upon the great Estate that I have got, upon the Family and Name that I have raised, or upon the Honours and Preferments that I have gone through: No, my *Soul* will then have a new Taste as well as my *Body*, and these things will be as insipid to me as my *Meat* and *Drink*; only the Conscience of having done well, will then refresh

fresh me, and yield me Peace and Consolation. This is that *Angel* that must support and strengthen me in that great and last *Agony*; nothing else is able to interpose for my relief, in that dreadful juncture, and this alone will be a sufficient Comforter and Assistant. Many things there are that divert and ingage our Thoughts in the *Course* of our *Life*, but at the *end* of it, there is nothing that will be regarded by us, or afford us any Satisfaction but a good Conscience. 2 *Cor.* 1. 12. Our rejoicing then will be this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and Godly Sincerity, we have had our Conversation in the World. And how infinitely then are we concerned to take heed to our ways to walk circumspectly, and heartily to apply our selves to that *now*, which will stand us in such stead *then*!

Besides, 'tis our greatest Wisdom as well as Interest, and the best Proof we can give of our being Rational Creatures: We think it a great Commendation of our Reason to be able to Dispute well, and Discourse well, and we are generally more impatient of what reflects upon our *Intellectuals*, than of what reflects upon our *Morals*. But certainly to Live well, is the greatest argument of Wisdom, and that which reflects upon our *Morals*, reflects most of all upon our Understandings. We Live now in an Age  
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wherein Craft and Worldly Policy, nay, and even down-right Knavery has usurped the name of Wisdom, and a Man is in danger of bringing his Parts in question, by adhering to his Duty against his Worldly Interest: But this is the Wisdom of Fools and Mad-men; of those who either think not at all, or else consider things by halves; 'tis in short the Wisdom of this World, which the Apostle tells us is Foolishness with God. But there is another Wisdom, and that is the *Wisdom of the Just*; and this is that Wisdom which God commends, and which we ourselves shall hereafter (when best able to judge,) commend too; for this is that Wisdom from above, which is first *Pure*, then *Peaceable*, *Jam. 3. 17.* which will bring us Peace at the last, and whereby we shall become Wise unto Salvation.

The Conclusion of all is, Time it self is short, the Time of Man is much shorter; Eternity has neither end nor change, and every Man is hastening to this Eternal and Unchangeable State; and therefore it infinitely concerns us all so to live while we sojourn in this World, that when we come to Dye, we may have these Two things to support us in that dreadful Hour, the Reflection upon the Innocency of our Life past, and the Prospect of future Glory and Happiness.

Which God of his Goodness grant us all,

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A Discourse concerning Heavenly-Mindedness.

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Phil. 3. 20. *For our Conversation is in Heaven.*

**T**HAT Man is deeply lapsed and degenerated from a state of Excellency and Perfection, is evident from the Ruins of his Nature, which is now too faulty and defective to be the first and original Workmanship of God; but in nothing is his Fall more signalized, than in that abject, servile and groveling disposition of Mind he now labours under: He has suffered indeed in all his Faculties, and every *String* of his Soul is put out of *Tune*; his Understanding has a Cloud dwelling upon it, his Will has lost much of its Verticity or Magnetick Inclination towards the chief Good; but that wherein he is most diminished, and stands most alienated from the *Life of God*; and the order of Grace, is the *Passionate* part of him, his Affections; these have suffered such a vast *Declination* from their true and natural

ral Point, and are so depressed into the dregs of the Material World, and are now become so unperceptive of any thing but the gusts and relishes of the Animal Nature, that instead of serving (as they were originally intended,) to the invigoration and actuation of the Soul, they are her greatest clog and impediment in all her Endeavours and Aspirations after the Divine Life.

This is that so much Celebrated *Metempsychosis* of the Platonists, the *Moulting of the Plumes* of the Soul; she is not only broken and wounded in her Wings, but utterly *unpinioned*, she has dropt her Feathers, and can no longer sustain her weight in the higher Regions, but falls down, and lies groveling upon the Ground; as if besides the Primitive Curse upon Man, of Tilling the Earth from whence he was taken, he had inherited that of the Serpent too, *Upon thy Belly shalt thou go, and Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy Life.*

And as this Demission of Soul is the most signal instance of the Degeneracy of Man, so is it commonly the last from whence we recover; our Affections are the most stubborn and unconquerable part about us, as being blind and unperceptive Appetites, and such as are set at the greatest distance from the *Light* of the Mind, which shines first upon the Will, and then upon the Passions;  
whole

whose illumination is therefore more feeble and languid. Hence it comes to pass, that this is the most difficult part to be managed, as there is more trouble with One Fool, than with Ten Wise Men : and when the Understanding and Will are resigned up, and given over to the importunity of him that stands at the Door and knocks, these still maintain the Fort against the Heavenly Battery, and are very often too successful in their resistance. Indeed the regulation of the *Pathetic* part is commonly the last conquest of Divine Grace, the consummating degree of Spiritual Life, the closing feature of that Image of God which is form'd in us ; for nothing is more common than to see Men of singular Strictness and virtuous Conversation in all other respects, who yet have their Affections deeply engaged in Secular Interests, who stoop and yield to the Magnetism of this dirty Planet, and (as the Apostle phrases it in the Verse before the Text,) *Mind* or relish *Earthly things* : An Eminent Example of this we have in the Story of the Young Man, who came to our Saviour to inquire what he should do to inherit Eternal Life ; who though a diligent Observer of the Law, and generally accomplished with moral Qualifications, insomuch that our Lord began to have a kindness for him, yet the *affectionate* part of his Soul had still a wrong Bias,

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and was not sufficiently weaned from Earthly good ; *One thing thou lackest*, and what was that ? Not more Justice, nor more Charity, nor more Temperance, but to have his Affections more loose and disengaged from the World ; for when he was bid go and Sell what he had and give it to the Poor, he was sad at that Saying, and went away grieved, though he was told at the same time, that it was to be only an *Exchange*, and that far for the better, that he should have Treasure in *Heaven*, *Mark 10. 21.* for what he quitted upon *Earth*.

But however difficult it may be for a Soul so low sunk in her Affections, to recover again upon the Wing, and bear up above the steams of the Flesh, and the attractions of the Animal Nature, yet this is that excellent end which the Christian Institution aims at, and which every good Christian ought diligently to endeavour after : For what the Author of our Faith and Happiness said of some particular Words of his, is true of all, that they are Spirit and Life, such as are able, and were designed to reanimate the dead and senseless Minds of Men, and to diffuse a vital heat throughout the torpid and benumm'd World. And accordingly St. *Paul* tell us, That Christianity is *νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς*, the Law of the Spirit of Life, and in another place, *δυνάμις τοῦ πνεύματος*,

*individual, The Ministration of the Spirit, 2 Cor.*

3. such as becomes a Vital Form in us, to give us Motion and Activity, and to raise us from that Sown and Lethargy, which by our Fall we were cast into. And the same Apostle makes it here the Character of an accomplished Christian, such who is fit to be proposed as an Example for our Imitation, that he is one that is not only above, but has nothing to do with the petty, trifling Interests of this lower World, but has his Thoughts and Affections wholly taken up and employed about the Beatitudes of the next. For says he, *Brethren, be Followers together of me, and mark them that walk so as ye have us for an Example; for our Conversation is in Heaven.* In discoursing upon which Words, I shall shew.

First, What is it to have our Conversation in Heaven.

Secondly, How reasonable and becoming it is for a Christian to do so.

Thirdly, What are the Uses and Advantages of such an Heavenly Dispensation of Life.

Now concerning the First, I consider that *Heaven* here may be understood either largely for the state of the other Life in general, by way of opposition to this, or more strictly for that special and excellent Portion of it, Glory and Happiness. If we consider

it according to the former sense, then to have our Conversation in Heaven, will be to be perpetually mindful of our Mortality, and that we are Citizens of another World, and must shortly take our leave of this; to have a constant prospect into that other World which must be our last Home, and to be always looking beyond the Horizon of Time, to the Long Day of Eternity, to dwell in the Meditation of the Four last things, Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgment; how great they are in their Consequence, how certain in the Event, and how near in their Approach, and in consideration of all this, to be always preparing for our great and final Change.

But if we consider it according to the latter and stricter Sense, then to have our Conversation in Heaven, will be frequently to contemplate the Infinite Perfections of the Divine Essence, the *First of Beings*, and the *Last of Ends*, and the unconceivable Happiness of those who shall enjoy the Communications of his Blessedness; to Contemplate, and have always in view that weight of Glory, that incorruptible Crown with which the Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared, no not to be mentioned. To meditate day and night upon that happy time, when we shall be Partakers of *Moses's* Wish, and be admitted to that intimate

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imate and naked Vision of that Mysterious and Incomprehensible Excellence, which is too great for our Mortal Faculties, and which none can *See* and *Live*: *Exod.* 33. 20. When we shall see him not in Symbols and Figures, not in Glories and sensible Manifestations, but openly and clearly, really and as he is, and from seeing him, be transformed into his likeness: 1 *John* 3. 2. To meditate upon the Blessed Society of Saints and Angels, upon the delicious repasts of Anthems and Allelujahs, and that more ravishing Harmony of Divine Love, and intellectual Sympathy; upon the elevated and raised Perfections of a glorified Soul, the enlargements of its Understanding, and the Sublimations of its Wills and Affections, and upon the Angelical Clarity and Divine Temper of our Resurrection Body: In sum, upon all those Glorious things which are spoken, and which even he that saw them could not *utter*, of the City of God, and upon the infinite Consolations of that joyful Sentence, *Come ye Blessed of my Father, Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the World*, 2 *Cor.* 12. 4. Lastly to contemplate all this not coldly and indifferently as a thing that is a great way off, or as an uncertain Reversion or imaginary *Utopia*, but as a state that will shortly and certainly be, and with that Faith and Assu-



rance which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen ; to Dwell, Converse, and have our *Civil Life* in Heaven, (for so the word *πολίτευμα* signifies,) as if we were already Inhabitants of that Blessed Place, and actual Members of that Sacred Policy and Community.

This is to have our Conversation in Heaven, this is that *Heavenly-Mindedness* which the great Apostle who had personally conversed in the Third Heaven, and seen there more than he could utter, proposes to the Imitation of his Followers, and for which he esteemed himself fit to be an Example : Which leads me to shew Secondly, what a reasonable and becoming thing it is for a Christian thus to have his Conversation in Heaven ; and to convince him that it is so, let him consider,

First, That the other Life is the state we are chiefly intended for, without respect to which there is nothing in this considerable enough to justify the Wisdom and Goodness of God in making the World ; that here we have no abiding City, no durable concern, and consequently what a Folly 'tis to let our Thoughts dwell where we but Sojourn our selves ; that this present state both by reason of its shortness and other Vanities, is upon no other account considerable, than as 'tis an opportunity for, and a Passage to the next ;

next ; that as it was not worth while for God to make it, fo neither is it for us to live in it, if it were not in order and relation to something further ; that it is a ſhort Voyage, and where the Haven lies always in ſight ; that 'tis the greateſt ſhort-ſightedneſs imaginable, not to ſee beyond ſo little a proſpect as the Grave, and the greateſt ſtupidity and dotage, to confine our Cares and Affections on this ſide of it, if we do : 'Tis true indeed if there were no other ſtate but the preſent, 'twould be our greateſt Prudence to make as much of it as we could, though 'twere more vain and contemptible than 'tis, becauſe 'tis our All ; 'twould then be as reaſonable to have our Converſation on *Earth*, as now 'tis to have it in *Heaven*, and the *Epicure's* Proverb would then be as Wiſe as any of *Solomon's*, *Let us Eat and Drink, for to Morrow we Dye.* But ſince we are aſſured by him who brought Life and Immortality to light through the Goſpel, that there is another ſtate, and that our Death is but the beginning of a new and never to be ended Life ; this one would think ſhould deſerve and engroſs all our Thoughts and Affections, our Meditations and Diſcourſes, and that we ſhould be no more concerned with the things of this World, that a *Ghost* is, that only comes to do a Meſſage of Providence, and when his Errand is over, vaniſhes and diſappears. Or

if we did at any time condescend to interest our selves in the Affairs or lawful Entertainments of this Life, methinks it should be only transiently and by the by, as the Hungry Disciples pluck'd the Ears of Corn, just to serve a present Necessity, or as the *Israelites* eat the Passover in haste, with our Loins girt, our Shoes on our Feet, and our Staff in our hand, *Exod. 12.*

Secondly, Let him consider that as the other state is the chief and proper state of Man, so Heaven is the good and happiness of that state, that 'tis the true natural Centre of our Rest, our Home and Native Region ; that the Joys there are unspeakable and full of Glory, such as the Senses of Man cannot taste, such as his understanding cannot at present conceive, and such as it will never be able to comprehend ; Joys that are without example, above experience, and beyond imagination, for which the whole Creation wants a Comparison, we an Apprehension, and even the Word of God a Revelation. That *Eternal Word* of God, which opened to us a Prospect of a future state, and brought Life and Immortality to light ; yet he attempted not to give us a representation of the Heavenly Felicity, but thought fit rather to cast that unexpressible Scene of Glory into a *Shade*. For indeed to what purpose should the Son of God go  
about

about to reveal the Secrets of the Kingdom to us, since if it were possible to describe it as it *is*, yet 'tis not possible for us to conceive it as it is *described*, but we must Dye and be Partakers of it, before we can either *understand* it or *indure* it ; this therefore would be a Revelation without a Discovery, a Revelation which he himself only could understand, another *Sealed Book* which none but himself would be able to open. Since then Heaven is a Place of such transcendent Glory and Happiness, as our present Faculties are not fine enough to *convince*, nor strong enough to *bear*, what can be more reasonable and becoming, than that we who are now journeying in the Wilderness towards this our Heavenly *Canaan*, where is our Portion and our Inheritance, should have our constant Conversation there by holy Contemplations and devout Affections, that so according to our Saviour's Argument, where our Treasure is, there our Heart may be also ? For what can be either a more noble or a more concerning Object for an Human Soul to Contemplate, than its last end and sovereign Happiness ; when all its Changes and Revolutions shall cease, all its Appetites be satisfied, and nothing further to be expected but a most delightful continuation of the same endless circle of Felicity ? Certainly one would think, that what will so wholly take  
up



up and engage the Soul when she comes to enjoy it, should be thought worthy to employ her best Thoughts now, as undoubtedly it would, did we firmly and heartily believe it. And therefore,

Thirdly, Consider that we have no other way of approving the sincerity and heartiness of our Faith, concerning Heaven and Happiness, but by having our Conversation there; for so great and glorious things are spoken of the City of God, that 'tis not morally possible that a Man should be heartily perswaded of the truth of them, and yet not to have the main current of his Thoughts and Affections run in that Channel: How is it possible that a Man should believe such great things, and yet not have his Thoughts dwell upon them? Some things indeed may be very little questioned, and yet as little thought of, because their *Moment* and Importance carries no proportion to their *Truth*; they are not *Realities*, but *Trifles*. But sure the things we now speak of, are too concerning, if true, not to be frequently and seriously considered: If once we are thoroughly perswaded of their Truth and Reality, their own concernment and importance will be enough to recommend them to our most inward and recollected Thoughts and Meditations; and therefore for my part when I see Men plunge themselves into the  
depths

depths of Sensuality and Worldly Interests, as if they never meant to rise again, to love the World as they are commanded to love God with all their Heart, Mind, Soul and Strength, to have no serious Thoughts and Remembrances of Heaven or Heavenly things, but to set up their Tabernacles, and say, 'tis good to be here; I must conclude, (and they may think me uncharitable if they please,) that whatever they pretend, they do not heartily and seriously believe there is any such place as Heaven; for if they did, considering the vast importance of the thing, it would certainly have a greater share of their Contemplations, and a larger room in their Hearts. And this very thing our Saviour intimates in his Reprehension of the immoderate Cares for the World; *These things*, says he, *the Gentiles seek*, those who have no revelation to assure them of a better and more induring Substance: Having no certainty of the future, they make most of the present, and in so doing, act in some measure according to their Principles. *But seek ye first the Kingdom of God; Mat. 6. 32, 33.* ye that have a Revelation of a nobler end, and of a far more excellent state, do you apply your selves principally to that, or else you will not act like your selves, and may justly be suspected of not *Believing* that Revelation which the others want.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, Consider that as the having our Conversation in Heaven, is an argument and test of our *Faith*, so is it also of our *Resurrection* with Christ, and our *Spiritual Life*; the Connexion is made by the Apostle, *If ye be then risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the Right Hand of God; set your Affections on things above, and not on things of the Earth; for ye are Dead, &c.* Col. 3. 1. In which Discourse 'tis evident, that the Apostle does not only exhort to Heavenly-Mindedness as a Christian Duty, but makes it also a certain Mark and Argument of Spiritual Life and Resurrection. The Marks and Signs of Grace have made a great part of some Mens Divinity, and they are generally such as do not want for Latitude and Comprehensive-ness; to be sure they contrived their business, so as to take in themselves and their own Party. But certainly there is not a more notorious Criterion whereby to distinguish the prevalency either of the Animal or of the Divine Life, than to consider how the Moral *Tast* and *Relish*, that which the Platonists call *Αἰσθητικὴ*, the *Boniform faculty* of the Soul stands affected. 'Tis a Shrewd Symptom of an ill habit of Body when the *Tast* comes to be so vitiated, as to delight to feed upon Trash and unwholsom things; and so 'tis in the state of the Mind, the  
Animal

Animal and Sensualized Man, as he does not *Perceive*, so neither does he *Relish* the things of God ; they have no congruity with that Life and Sense that is most invigorated and awaken'd in him, and therefore he prefers his Husks and Acorns before the hidden Manna, and the Food of Angels. But he who is Born of that incorruptible Seed mentioned by St. Peter, 1 Pet. 1. 23. and in whom the Divine Life is most excited, he having his Spiritual Senses well disposed and exercised, finds a particular gust in Divine things, contracts his Affections upon Heaven and Happiness, looks upon all inferiour good as dry and insipid, and is ready to say with the Psalmist, *One thing have I desired of the Lord, even that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my Life, to behold the fair Beauty of the Lord, and to visit his Temple, Psal. 27.* This is the Desire, that is the Relish of a Spiritually disposed Soul, of a Soul that is dead to the World, and alive unto God ; the Sum of all which is briefly comprized in that of the Apostle, *They that are after the Flesh do mind, or (as the Word also signifies,) do relish the things of the Flesh, and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.* This is a short and compendious, but a very great Test of Spiritual Life, and that whereby we may distinguish a vital Sense of Religion from a formal Profession of it.

Fifthly



Fifthly and Lastly, Consider that one great end of our Saviour's Ascending into Heaven in his Human Nature was, that we Christians might have our Conversation there; in order to which end, the Ascension of Christ has a double Influence, First as a Rational Motive, and Secondly as a Moral Emblem.

First as a *Rational Motive*, for since the Ascension of our Saviour into Heaven adds new Supplements of support to our Hopes of arriving thither (his Ascension being a Pledge and Pattern of ours,) it must needs at the same time fan the Flame of our Affections, and make them tend upwards with importunate reaches towards Heavenly Objects. For this is a Maxim which *Experience* as well as *Philosophy* has stamped for truth, that the more our Hope of any good is established, the more our Desires after it are increased, and that nothing sooner cools the Fever of the Affections, than Despair of Fruition; Whence it follows, that the Ascension of Christ by adding further encouragement to our Hopes, becomes a Rational Motive to us to refine and elevate our Affections, and to have our Conversation in that Heaven of our Interest in which the Ascension of Christ in our Nature is so convincing an Assurance.

Secondly, As a *Moral Emblem*; the whole  
course

course of our Saviour's Actions tends to our instruction and admonishment ; and though some of them were never intended to be copied out in kind, as being set above the Sphere of our imitation, yet they are not so far out of our reach, but that they point out to us some *resembling* Excellence, and may be imitated though not *literally*, yet in *Figure* and *Mystery*. Of this kind are the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord ; for although with him we cannot as yet loosen the bands of Death, and break the Prison of the Grave, yet we can now in some sense rise with him, from the Death of Sin, to newness of Life, and are by his Resurrection not only *inabled*, but also *admonished* to do so. And altho' as to his Bodily Ascension, (as our Lord told St. *Peter*,) we cannot follow him now, yet we can in some sense ascend with him, by a passionate elevation of our Thoughts and Affections, and are also mystically invited to do the latter from the Contemplation of the former. The Local and Bodily Ascension of Christ, calls for a Moral and Spiritual Ascent ; *John* 12. 32. *If I be lifted up from the Earth, I will draw all Men unto me*, said our Lord in reference to his Crucifixion. How much more powerful then ought this Consideration to be in reference to his *Ascension* ; for it cannot be said of him now, what was then, when his  
 Beauty

Beauty was benighted under a Cloud, that there is no Form nor Comeliness in him; that we should desire him; for now are the Mists scattered before the prevailing Sun, he shines forth in his full Glory and Triumph, yea, he is now altogether Lovely. Now therefore may the Pious and Seraphick Soul bear up her self upon the Wings of Contemplation, Love and Desire, and follow her Ascending Lord where the Eyes of the wondering Apostles were forced to leave him, and say in the Words of *Elisba* to his departing Master, *as the Lord liveth, and as thy Soul liveth I will not leave thee*; 2 *Kin.* 2. 2. and blessed is he that hath part in this first Ascension, for over him the Second Death shall have no Power.

And thus have I shewn by several Considerations, what a reasonable and becoming thing it is for a Christian to have his Conversation in Heaven; but it will appear yet much more so, if we consider in the Third and Last place, the great Uses and Advantages of such a Heavenly dispensation of Life, and they are many; but I shall consider only some of the most remarkable of them.

First, This is a most excellent expedient to beget and confirm in us the contempt of the World, and of all those Poms and Vanities of it which we renounced in our Baptism; this is a mighty thing, and a thing that has  
been

been essayed by several methods, as by Monastic Engagements, by retiring into Cloisters and Deserts, by Vows of Poverty and the like : But these are rather Natural than Moral Ways of forsaking the World ; and 'tis considerable that our Saviour in his last Intercession for his Disciples, Prays not that they should be taken out of the World, but delivered from the evil of it, *John 17. 15.* The best way to forsake the World, is to do it in Heart and Affection, and the most effectual means to do this, is by conversing in the other World. This indeed may be done by a serious Contemplation of the powers of *external* Nature, and of the capacities of our *own* ; by comparing which two together, we may be satisfied of the Vanity and insufficiency of all Worldly Objects to the purposes of Content and Happiness. And this was the course that *Solomon* took to convince himself and others of the World's Vanity. But besides that this is a long way about, and a way that requires a great deal of Time, and a great deal of Experience, and a great deal of Meditation and Reflection ; it is also a Method fit only for finer and more elevated Spirits, those of a Contemplative Genius, and of a Nice Discernment. But to Converse in Heaven, is a more compendious and easie Method to contemn the lower World, more practicable to the common sort ; and those

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that cannot in the other way *Dispute* and *Demonstrate*, may however in this be *sensibly* convinced of the Vanity of the World. The Earth to us that dwell upon it, seems a Body of considerable Magnitude, but to one that should take a view of it from one of the higher Orbs, 'twould appear but as a *Point*. The same indeed might be demonstrated upon *Mathematic* Principles, but every one is not capable of doing that, and such an high rais'd prospect would save the trouble. And so 'tis in the case before us ; this World considered alone may perhaps carry with it a specious and goodly Appearance, and he that does so consider it, will need Reason and Argument to convince him of its Vanity ; but 'tis but to converse a little in the other World, and take a view of from thence, and 'twill all without any more ado shrink almost into nothing. And therefore 'twas not without reason that the Divine Philosopher stiled Philosophy *the Theory of Death* ; for certainly the Contemplation of the other state, is the most compendious way to true Philosophy, the Contempt of the World far beyond all the ways of Reason or Discourse, all the rigid and mortifying Lectures of *Stoicism*. And accordingly I observe that the Author to the *Hebrews* says of *Abraham*, Heb. 11. 9. that *by Faith he Sojourned in the Land of Promise as in a strange Country, dwelling*

*ling in Tabernacles*: And the reason of his doing so more expressly follows, *for he look'd for a City which has Foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God*; so that this was that which drew off *Abraham's* Affections from the Land of Promise, because by Faith he had a Prospect of a far better Country, and had his Conversation in Heaven.

Secondly, this is the best Remedy to support us under the Evils of this present Life; as it lessens the good, so it lessens the evil of it too, and will serve to support us under the one, as well as to wean us from the other. Nay, to speak the truth, it will not so much support us under these Evils as take them away, and render them slight and inconsiderable. For suppose the worst that can be, Death, and a painful Death, he that has his Conversation in Heaven, views the Glory that shall be revealed there, and at once sees that the sharpest Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with them, no more than the *Point* of a Circle is with its *Circumference*: He contemplates the Joy that is set before him, and so indures the Cross, and despises the Shame and the Pain too: For a view of Heaven will mitigate any Cross upon Earth, and help us to encounter any Affliction as *St. Stephen* did his Martyrdom: He is one of those steady Men the Psalmist speaks of, *Psal. 112. 7.*

who are not afraid at any evil Tidings, but his Heart stands fixed in the Lord. Much less will he for the dread of any Persecutions or Worldly Losses deny his Religion, or by a Trimming and Hypocritical Mode of Behaviour, court the Favour of those in Power, or by any sinful compliance part with a good Conscience. He sees nothing so great or so terrible in this World, as to fright him into any such unworthinesses; no, they that do so, have not their Conversation in Heaven, but are Earthly, Sensual and Devilish, and for all their Pretences to *Self-denial*, deny nothing of themselves that I know of, but their *Understandings*. He that truly converses in Heaven, sees infinitely more there than he can either *get* or *lose* here, and can therefore never be guilty of such a Foolish Exchange, as to gain not the *whole*, but a *little* of the World, and lose his own Soul.

Thirdly, This Dispensation of Life is the best Preparatory for Heaven that can possibly be; for besides that the *greatness* of that Happiness makes him that Contemplates it, despise any good or evil that may here stand in competition with it; he further considers the *Nature* and *Quality* of that Happiness, that it is an union of the Soul with her best and last end, that it is a clear Vision and an ardent Love of God, who cannot be seen by him that *Lives*; much less by him that

*Lives*

*Lives ill*; and this must needs put him upon thinking, that a Holy and Divine frame of Spirit is absolutely requisite, not only as a *Condition* to our *Admission* into Heaven, but also as a *Condition* of *Enjoyment*, without which there is no being Happy even when we are there. And from this Consideration, he naturally passes to fit himself for the enjoyment of his Maker, to Purify himself as he is Pure, to Purge, Refine, and Spiritualize his Nature, that so he may be qualified for the refined Joys of Heaven. The short is, there are Two things that must and will be considered by him that has his Conversation in Heaven, the *Greatness* of the Happiness there, and the *Nature* of it; and each of these has a particular influence for the preparing him for it: The former will make him Temptation-Proof against any present good or evil that shall stand in his way to his great Prize, and the latter will contribute to form and fashion the frame of his Mind into a likeness and affinity with the end which he proposes: But both together will so strongly influence the Man, that he will become perfectly *insensible*, dead to himself and to all the Luscious Relishes of the Corporeal Life, and the Life of God will be triumphantly seated in him, so that now he has but one only Will in the World, which is to have none at all of his own, but



to *annihilate* himself, that God may be all in all in him. And thus while like *Moses* he converses with God on this holy Mount, his Face shines with a Divine Glory, and he is transfigured into the likeness of him whom his Soul loves.

Fourthly and Lastly, This is a dispensation of Life, that affords the greatest Pleasure and Satisfaction of any in the World, to ascend the top of the Mystical *Pisgah*, and thence to take a survey of the Happy Land; to contemplate the infinite Perfection of God, and the Happiness of those Blessed Spirits that enjoy him, the Order of Angels, and that Noble and Blessed Communication of Saints; to contemplate the last and richest Scene of Providence, and the Discovery of all the rest that went before; when the reason of all difficult and perplexing Appearances shall be made plain, and the *manifold Wisdom* of God sent in a clear Light; to have our Minds employed about the greatest and best things, to walk with God, and keep a constant Communication with Heaven, must needs be the sweetest as well as the noblest and most worthy Entertainment on this side of it. *Intellectual Pleasures* are certainly greater than *Sensual*, even by the Confession of the greatest Sensualists, as may appear from this single instance, in that Men will abstain from the greatest

greatest Pleasures of Sense, that they may not lose a good Reputation, which is an Intellectual good ; and as Intellectual Pleasures are greater than Sensual, so this is the greatest of those that are Intellectual. Concerning this the same may be said that is of Wisdom, that *her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and that all her Paths are Peace ; that she is a Tree of Life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her ; Prov. 3. 17.* That they who eat of her shall yet be Hungry, and they that drink of her shall yet be Thirsty. For there is a certain inexhaustible Well of Pleasure, a fathomless Abyss of Delight in this Heavenly Conversation, which they only, who have experimented it, can *conceive*, and which even they want Power to *describe*.

This I know will be far from satisfying some Voluptuaries, who are sunk so low into the contrary Life, that of Sense and Carnality, that they will think a Man Mad that shall either *Talk* or *Live* at this Abstracted rate ; but to these I have Two things to say : First, That their having no notion of the Pleasure of this Dispensation, is no Objection against it ; the thing may be true for any thing they know or can say to the contrary, for they are not, during the quick sensibility and invigoration of the lower Life, proper Judges in the case, any

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more than the *Sense* it self is of an Intellectual Object ; for these things are spiritually discerned by a certain Divine Taste and Sensation, which is a Faculty which these Men want.

The other thing I shall commend to the Sensualist is this, that since he is too scrupulous and sceptical to take our word for it, he would endeavour after such a degree at least of Spiritual Purification, as to try the Experiment, that as the Psalmist speaks, he would *Taste* and *See* how good and pleasant this Heavenly Conversation is ; and then I'm much mistaken if he does not find that all the Madness lay on his side, if he does not confess that there are no Joys like Spiritual Joys, and that one Day spent in these *Anti-Courts* of Heaven is better than a Thousand.

And now since it appears to be a thing of so much reason and becomingness, and of so great use and advantage to have our Conversation in Heaven, methinks we should easily be perswaded to enter upon this Heavenly Dispensation of Life. The Region we now converse in, is very incommodiously seated, and of an unwholsome Complexion, such as does not agree with the Constitution of the Soul, where she is always sickly and out of order, full of weaknesses and indispositions ; why then do we not change our Abode, and  
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remove our dwelling into our Native Country, where there is a purer Air, and a more healthy Climate ! When we hear or read a Description of a very pleasant Country, such as the *Bermuda Islands*, where the Sky is Serene and Clear, the Air Temperate and Healthy, the Earth Fruitful and Entertaining, where there are Walks of Oranges, and Woods of Cedar Trees ; though we have no probable prospect of our going to dwell there, yet we can't chuse but often think, and sometimes dream of it, and wish our selves the happiness of so pleasant an Abode. Why then do not our Thoughts dwell more in Heaven, where besides the far greater delightfomness of the Place, we have a particular *Interest* and *Concern* to invite us thither ? 'Tis the hope of arriving at Heaven at last that supports our Life upon Earth ; it is not able to support it self : One or two turns here, gives a Considering Man a full compass of its Enjoyments, and he no sooner comes to understand them, but he despises them. And what shall a Wise Man do, what refuge has he after this Discovery, but to Converse in Heaven ? What Expedient is there left, but to *anticipate those Joys*, when he can no longer *taste these* ?

So that there is a necessity of conversing in Heaven, if 'twere only to relieve the Vanity of Earth ; and happy is the Man who  
has



has so much of Heaven while he is upon Earth: Yea, *Blessed is the Man whom thou choosest O Lord, and receivest unto thee; he shall dwell in thy Court, and shall be satisfied with the Pleasures of thy House, even of thy Holy Temple, Psal. 65. 4.*

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## A Discourse concerning Submission to Divine Providence.

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*John 18. 11. The Cup which my Father has given me, shall I not Drink it?*

**T**HIS is a Question which our Lord puts to himself; and 'tis well he did so, for had he put it to any body else, 'tis great odds but that it had been answered in the *Negative*; for the great and general Centre of Human Nature, whither all the Lines of Appetite tend, and where they all meet, is *Happiness*; The desire of Happiness is the First and *Master-Spring* of the *Soul*, as the Pulse of the Heart is in the *Body*, that which sets all the Wheels on work, and governs all the *under-motions* of the Man: 'Tis that original Weight and Bias which the Soul

Soul first received from the Hands of her Creator, and which she can never lose so long as she herself is : 'Tis indeed the strongest and most radical Appetite that we have, an Appetite to which God *has* not set any bounds, and to which Man *cannot* ; an Appetite that is ungovernable and unconfined in it self, and that gives Measures and Laws to all the rest ; and consequently there is nothing which so ill comports with our Nature, which so directly crosses the *grain* of our Constitution, as that which threatens or offers the least contradiction to this ruling Inclination of it. Hence it is that *Evil* is the great *antipathy* of Human Nature, which though it has many particular Aversions, yet this is her great and general Abhorrence : From this at its first approach the whole Man shrinks in, and stands averse, and would be removed from it (if possible) an infinite distance ; the *Animal* part of Man is against it, and the *Reason* of Man wonders and disputes how such an uncooth thing came into the World, and several *Hypotheses* have been advanced to account for that strange Appearance ; *πῶς δὲ τὸ κακόν* was the great knot of antient Morality, and the most gravelling Problem of all the Heathen Philosophy ; and I question whether Reason without the assistance of Revelation can conquer the Difficulty. So that considering the

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Opposition that it carries to the whole Man, both to our *Appetites* and to our *Understandings*, there seems nothing more difficult than to be reconciled to it, though it be in order to a greater advantage, and we see an excellent glory behind the Cloud.

'Tis said by *Plato*, that *Pleasure* and *Pain* are the two Nails that fasten both the Wings of the Soul down to the Earth, and hinder its Ascent upward; and the Wise

\* *Epicurus*. \* *Stoick* has most excellently summ'd up the whole difficulty of Vertue into *μῆχην* and *ὑπομῆχην* to *Abstain* and *Sustain*: Indeed Abstinence and Patience are the Two most rough and uneasie Places in all the Stage of Vertue; the rest of her ways are ways of Pleasantness, and all her other Paths are Peace. But here the Traveller meets with Trouble and Discouragement, is engaged in a point of Labour and Contention, and though in the Event he perform his Duty and bear forth good Seed, yet 'tis always with the reluctancy of his lower faculties, and (as the Psalmist expresses it,) *he goes on his way sorrowing*.

But the chiefest and noblest Scene of Vertue lies in *Patience*; 'tis hard to abstain from Pleasure, but 'tis much harder to indure Misery, (which is the Reason by the way that the Sanctions of Laws are generally taken rather from Punishments than from

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Rewards,) and of all Obedience, that which is *Passive* is most difficult ; for we hate Pain to an higher degree than we love Pleasure. And of this the Infernal Spirit was so sensible, (one who dwelling with everlasting Burnings is best able to judge of the difficulty of submitting to Misery,) that he presumed to say concerning that excellent Person whom God had commended for his Integrity in all the instances of *Active* Obedience, and whom he himself knew to be a Miracle of *Patience* in particular, that if God would but put forth his Hand, and touch him with some near and cleaving Affliction, he would curse him to his Face, *Job* 1. 11.

And to this purpose 'tis yet further observable, that even the Disciples of the Blessed Jesus whom he had picked and chosen out of the promiscuous Herd of Mankind, and who followed this Lamb whithersoever he went, and traced him through all the narrow paths of a Vertuous and Religious Life, yet when he came to Mount *Calvary*, within view of the Cross, they all forsook him and fled, stopt short at the foot of the dreadful Hill, and left him to tread the Winepress alone : and even he that had most courage and presence of Mind, and dared furthest, he whom St. *Chrysostome* calls the *Warm Disciple*, even he followed him but afar off, *Luke* 22. 54.

Nay,



Nay, even our Blessed Saviour himself, who besides the peculiar excellency of his Human Spirit, and the incentives of an Omnipotent Love, had also the Divinity of his Person for his immediate Succour and Support; as he fainted as to his *Body* strength under the *Load* of the Cross, so was he amazed into an Agony and Sweat of Blood at the very apprehension of what he was to suffer upon it, and almost fainted in his *Resolution* too, till after the recollections of Meditation, and the confirmation of an Angel, he overcame the tenderness and reluctancies of innocent Nature, with the perfection of Submission and Resignation, emptied himself of his own *Will*, as he had formerly done of his Heavenly *Glories*, and refused all help and deliverance both from the Guard of his Angels, and the over-officious Sword of his zealous Apostle with this gentle Reproof, *Put up thy Sword into the Sheath; the Cup which my Father has given me shall I not drink it?*

The full sense of which Words is resolvable into these Two Propositions.

First, That every Affliction which befalls Man, is dispensed to him by the hand of Providence; which is intimated in these Words, *the Cup which my Father has given me.*

Secondly, That therefore he ought to submit to it with all Patience, Meekness, Contentedness

tentedness and Resignation of Spirit intimated in the last Clause, *Shall I not drink it?*

And First, that every Affliction which befalls Man, is dispensed to him by the hand of Providence: That there is such a thing as Providence in general, and that God does concern himself in the Government and Management both of the Material and Intellectual World, by ruling and ordering the *Motions* of the former, and the *Actions* and *Events* of the latter, though denied by the School of *Epicurus*, is yet I think acknowledged by all that own a *Creation*, and certainly with great agreeableness and consistency with that Principle. For besides that Creation doth both *suppose* and *produce* Love towards the Creature, suppose it as the *Principle*, and produce it as the *Effect*; it being impossible that God should either create what he did not Love, or Love what he has created; according to that Observation of the Wise Man, *Wisd. 11. 32. For thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made; for never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it.* I say, besides that Love of God which follows upon the Creation, and that care which as closely follows upon the Supposition of his Love, I further consider, that it had not been worth the while for God to have created a World, if he did not intend

to govern it; for since the World is not capable of governing it self, and conducting the infinite variety of its own motions to any excellent end, and since without some conduct or other, it must needs fall into disorder and confusion, if God will not undertake the Government of it; to what purpose should he make such a World, which without his care of it would bring him more *Disbonour* by its *After-disorders*, than *Glory* by its *first Production*? And Disorder is a thing so opposite to God, that we find he could not be reconciled to a *Natural Chaos*, much less then can he be to a *Moral one*, especially in a World of his own raising; for indeed Creation is too great a work to be bestowed upon a World which is ever after to be abandoned and left to it self. And since God has ingrafted into the nature of every Animal, affectionate Propensions towards its own Productions, whether Natural, Mechanical or Intellectual, nothing can be more absurd, than to imagine that he would be so ill a *Parent* himself, as to expose this his own Offspring, and which as soon as brought forth, he Loved, and pronounced very good, to the uncertainties of Chance and Contingency.

Besides, we are naturally led to the existence of Providence by the consideration of the Divine Perfections, such as his Omnipotence;



tence, Omnipresence, Omniscience, Goodness and Justice. And accordingly we find, that even *Aristotle* and the *Peripateticks*, who would not allow the World to be Created by God, as supposing it to be Eternal and Uncreated, yet were forced from the Contemplation of the Divine Excellencies to acknowledge it to be Govern'd by him. They own'd a Providence, though they disown'd a Creation, and that from a serious consideration of the excellent nature and attributes of God, which they thought would sufficiently engage him to take care of the World though he did not make it : And truly were the Supposition possible, I should yet think as they do ; for sure God is too great and too good a Being to suffer Anarchy and Confusion wherever there is a Capacity of Order.

*Epicurus* indeed turns this Argument quite a contrary way, and from the Perfection of the Deity, argues for his profound Repose and Inactivity ; that being fixed upon his own Center, and full of himself, he has nothing to do but to live at large, secure and unconcerned, and enjoy the richness of his own Essence, with an infinite and undivided Complacency. But this all depends upon that precarious and ill natured Principle of his, that all Benevolence proceeds from Indigence, or which is the same in other terms, that all Love is Self Love ; which in-



deed if true, will oblige us to confess, that the more perfect and self-sufficient any Being is, the less solicitous he must be of the concerns of others; and consequently a Being absolutely Perfect as God is, must of necessity be wholly destitute of all Benevolence towards other beings, and without any concern for their welfare. For no consequence is more plain than this, that if all Love be from Want, then that Being who is absolutely removed from Want cannot be capable of any Love. *Epicurus* his Inference therefore is very right, but the ground upon which he proceeds is false, in making all Love to owe its rise to Indigence.

I shall not here undertake a *direct* confutation of this illiberal and strait-laced Notion, having particularly considered it elsewhere; I shall only remark at present, that the falseness of this *Epicurean* Principle, is put out of all Question to us who believe a *Creation*; for if, that Love proceeds from want, be an Argument that a perfect Being can have no Love, then we may argue as well the other way, that if a perfect Being does Love, then Love does not proceed from want. And we have sufficient discovery of this in the Creation, which considering the Self-sufficiency of the Divine Nature, must needs be the effect of a pure, unselfish, and dif-

*Theor. and Regulat. of Love.*  
P. 52.

disinterested Love: Which by the way is a consideration that mightily commends the excellency of the Divine Goodness, and should wind up our Affections to great Heights of Praise and Gratitude.

And as the *Self-Sufficiency* of God is no Bar against Providence, (being only upon a mistaken Principle of *Epicurus* alledged to that purpose,) so are his other Perfections a strong Argument for it; *that* is consistent with it, and *those* do necessarily infer it. Thus his Omnipotence, Omnipresence, and Omniscience render him abundantly able to sit at the Helm of this great Vessel, and his Goodness and Justice ingage him to undertake the Charge. He that contemplates the former, can no longer question, *Job 22. 13. How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark Cloud?* Nor he that contemplates the latter, suspect, that he purposely declines the Office, and *walks* idle and unconcern'd in the *Circuit of Heaven*. Besides, the Perfections of God would not appear so conspicuously, if there were no Providence. 'Tis great to Create, but 'tis more to Govern a World; as the Skill of the Artist is more seen in well ordering and artfully touching the Strings of a Musical Instrument, than in the first making and framing of it.

And if it be once granted that there is a Providence, 'tis an absurd and ridiculous

conceit, to confine it, (as some do,) to the *Superlunary* Regions ; for the same Arguments that infer the being of Providence in general, conclude also for the *Universality* of it. 'Tis most congruous to think that the Providence of God is of equal extent with his Creation (for sure that which was not too mean to be Created, cannot be too mean to be Governed,) and that the same Loving and Harmonious Spirit that first moved upon the face of the Waters and ranged the most *minute* particles of Matter into Beauty and Order, does still run through the now Organized Mass, and preside over, and sweetly direct, not only the Greater, but also the *Lesser Motions* of this his most exquisite Machine : For without this the Harmony of the Universe would be very defective, and its parts disproportionate and ill-forted. 'Tis true, Beauty and Order would dwell above, but all would be Chaos and Confusion below, and the *Earth* would still be *without form and void*. And thus the irregularity of the lower World would cast a disparagement upon the whole System of things, as the untunableness of One or Two Instruments dis-recommends the whole Musical Consort.

'Tis therefore necessary to affirm, that the Providence of God extends to both Worlds, as the Sun Beautifies and Inlightens each  
each



each Hemisphere. In this respect also as well as others, that Divine Comparison will hold, *God is Light, and in him is no Darkness at all.* But though nothing be too small or inconsiderable for the Comprehensive reach of the Divine Cognizance, yet we may reasonably suppose that he considers the value of his Creatures, and proportions his Providential Care according to their different Excellencies. Now throughout all the order of the Visible Creation, Man is the most noble and accomplished Being, and consequently the chiefest Object, the most peculiar *Charge* of Providence ; so peculiar, that as the *Creation* of other Sublunary things carried a peculiar respect to Man, so is their *Government* too chiefly in subordination to his Interest. And indeed 'tis no more than what by the Measures of Proportion we are warranted to suppose, that he should have a more than ordinary Interest in the care and super-intendency of his Creator, who was made by an immediate Pattern from himself, and with his solemn Counsel and Deliberation.

Nor is this ever waking and broad Eye of Divine Providence open only on the Societies and Communities of Men, and intent only upon the Revolutions of States and Kingdoms, but also watches over the affairs and concerns of every particular Person in the

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World ;



World; no Man is too little and despicable for the notice of Providence, however he may be overlook'd by his Fellow-Creatures; for we are told in Scripture not only of the Guardian Angel of the Jews and the Prince of Persia, but that we should take heed how we offend or despise even the meanest of Men, because of the interest they have among the Angels of special Presence, the Courtiers of Heaven, *Matt. 18. 7.* Nay we are told by the same infallible Oracle, that even the very Hairs of our Head are all numbered; so that not only the meanest of Men, but even the meanest things relating to them, their most indifferent and insignificant concerns are under the Charge and Care of Providence.

And if the care of Providence be so very punctual and exact even to Grains and Scruples in the most trifling and indifferent Concerns of Man, we may with great reason conclude, that it is much more so in our more weighty and considerable Interests: And since not only our present but future Happiness depends much upon various junctures of Circumstances and States of Life, we have consequently reason to conclude, that these are more particularly conducted by God's Providential Hand; and accordingly that *Affliction comes not forth of the Dust, neither does Trouble spring out of the Ground,*  
*Job*

*Job 5. 6.* but are disposed and ordered by God, and Arrest us with a Divine Commission. And accordingly the excellent Wisdom of our Church in her Office for the Visitation of the Sick, Piously orders the Minister to exhort the Sick Person after this Form, *Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of Life and Death, and of all things to them pertaining, as Youth, Strength, Health, Age, Weakness and Sickness: Wherefore, whatsoever your Sickness is, know you certainly that it is God's Visitation, &c.* As indeed we have reason to think that every other Affliction is as well as Sickness, that there is a Chastising as well as Destroying Angel, and that all Plagues are from God as well as those of *Egypt*; that no Calamity can either privily steal or violently break in upon us without the Divine notice and particular permission. But that every bitter Draught which we take, is weighed, mingled and reach'd out to us by an invisible Hand, by the Dispensation of Providence, that 'tis a *Cup which our Father has given us*: Our infinitely Wise, Good, and Compassionate Father, one who knows to chuse for us infinitely better than we can for our selves, and whose infinite Goodness, Love and Faithfulness, give us all possible assurance that he will use his Wisdom for our best Interest, and give good Gifts to his Children,

Which leads me to consider the Second general Proposition, that therefore we ought to submit to every Dispensation with all Patience, Meekness, Contentedness and Resignation of Spirit.

Patience and Resignation under all Providential dispensations however difficult in the *Prattick*, has yet perhaps more to be said for it in the *Theory*, than any one instance in all Morality; but I am obliged by the limits of my Discourse, to confine my Thoughts at present to such Arguments and Considerations only as may be afforded by the excellent Nature, Attributes and Relation of God. For 'twas for this reason alone, that our Blessed Lord cheerfully submitted to the drinking of his Bitter Potion, because 'twas given him by his Father, *The Cup which my Father has given me.*

And that this is a Pillar strong enough for so great a weight, a sufficient Argument for the most Heroical Resignation under the most accumulated Affliction, not to argue from the example of our Blessed Lord who supported his labouring Courage by this single Consideration, under the weight of his unparallel'd Agony, will clearly appear, if we consider some of the excellent Attributes and Perfections of God. Those which more eminently conduce to this purpose, and wherewith I shall at present content my self,



self, are his Supream Dominion, his Self-sufficiency, his Infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and his Paternal Relation to us.

First then, we may consider, that he from whose Hands we receive our bitter Cup, has a Sovereign Right and Dominion over us; which though we state at the lowest pitch, and do not bottom it with some upon the *ὑμεῖς*, or super-eminency of the Divine Nature, or with others on the unlimitedness of the Divine Power, but rather (which indeed seems more reasonable,) upon the benefit of Creation, yet even then will follow that he may justly make what deductions he please from the sum of our Happiness, within the Compass and Latitude of that Benefit. And consequently we have no just reason to murmur, as if Injured, though either by Deprivements or positive Inflictions he diminished our Happiness, so long till he leave us in a state just preferable to that of *Non-existence*; though he should draw out our Happiness to the very Lees, strip us of all good but that slender one of *Being*, and forbid us the taste of every Tree but this *One*, that grows in the whole Paradise of God. Thus I say by reason of the freeness of his Favours, God may deal with the most innocent and spotless of all his Angels, who after all this vast Substraction, and in this state of extream Barrenness and Sterility, are yet his Debtors;



Debtors; and therefore instead of Murmuring and Repining, obliged to take up the Resolution of the Psalmist, *While I live I will Praise the Lord; yea as long as I have any Being, (though nothing besides,) I will sing Praises unto my God, Psalm 146.*

But though God might justly do this, and consequently though even in this case, Patience and Resignation were highly reasonable, yet 'tis not his method to deal thus arbitrarily with us, or to proceed to the utmost Bounds of his Dominion; he has by his very donation of Being to his Creatures, given them all the fair grounds imaginable to hope and expect that all his after-proceedings toward them shall be agreeable and correspondent to that his first Favour, and that he will never take from us the least Scruple of that Felicity wherewith he invested us at the first Minute of our existence, without either our own fault, or a reference to some further Advantage; the first of which takes away all occasion of Complaint, and the Second calls for our Praise and Eucharist.

And that this is the measure whereby God deals with us, we may be well assured, if we consider the other remaining Attributes, his Self-sufficiency, his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, and his Paternal relation to us; God is a Being, whose Happiness as 'tis always perfect, equal, uniform, and at  
full

full height like his other Excellencies, so is it wholly absolved and consummated within himself, and admits of no Foreign Ingredient into its Composition. He is as happy as he can ever possibly be in his own Essence, and consequently can neither *receive* nor *propose* any Advantage to himself in any change that is wrought in the Creature; he stands in no need of our *Happiness*, much less of our *Misery*; and therefore whensoever he lays an Affliction upon us, since he can have no Interest of his own to serve by it, we must either say that he afflicts us merely for Affliction's sake, or that he designs it in order to a more important good of the Patient; To affirm the former would be Absurdity, Impiety, and Blasphemy, and withal contrary to the express voice of Scripture, which tells us that God does not *afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men*, Lam. 3. 33. The latter therefore must be concluded, that all the Evils which God dispenses to us, (except only where our extream Demerit alters the Case, as in the instance of *Damnation*,) are designed for our greater Interest either here or hereafter, and to *Perfect* or *Consecrate* us *through Sufferings*, Heb. 2. 10. They are indeed the Arrows of the Almighty, but sent upon a Friendly Errand; present Interruptions, but future Inlargements of our Happiness; like the

the Misty Veil of the Morning, which for a while shuts in the Rays of the Sun, but at length contributes to the greater Lustre and Triumph of the Day.

And to this purpose we may further consider, that the great Moderator of the Universe, and Supream Disposer of all Events, is infinitely Wise and Good, as well as Self-sufficient, and consequently cannot but do things for the *Best*; for as he is too Self-sufficient to drive on any Interest of his own, so is he too Wise to mistake ours, and too Good not to execute the dictates of his Wisdom; the consequence of which two Suppositions, must needs be the disposal of all things in the best way and manner that is possible. 'Tis much more rational in it self, and less derogatory to the Divine Perfections, to suppose with *Epicurus* that God does not at all meddle with the Affairs of the World, than that he does it by *halves*, and steers his great Vessel with a disadvantageous conduct. There is no Artist, but will perform to the utmost of his Skill, provided it be as easie for him to make his Piece compleat, as to *under-work* it. And that 'tis so to God, we can no more dispute, than we can the absolute Infinity and Perfection of his Nature. Certain therefore it is, that if God Governs the World, 'tis Govern'd altogether as well as 'twas made, that is, as well as

as is possible: *Θεὸς γεωμετρεῖ*, says *Plato*, God acts the part of a Geometrician, does all things exactly and regularly; thus he made the World, and thus he governs it, he proceeds by the same Standard in both, and his Government of the World is no less Mathematically exact than his Creation of it. 'Tis true indeed, the exactness of the former is not so obvious to our observation, as that of the latter, nor are we so well able to judge of the *Moral*, as of the *Natural* Geometry of God: But considering the Perfection of God, and the Imperfection of our Capacities, we have no reason to question, but that one is as exact as the other, and both as exact as possible. Not that this is to be understood in an *Absolute*, but in a *Relative* Sense; for as to the Perfection of the Natural World, we do not require that every Species of Being should be in the highest Perfection, whereof a Creature is capable, (1 Cor. 12. 17. *for if the whole Body were an Eye, where were the Hearing?*) So neither are we to measure the perfection of the Moral World by single and separate Instances, but by the whole conduct and course of the Divine Dispensation. And then as in Music, what is Discord in particular and separately considered, will be Harmony upon the whole; a far more excellent Harmony to the *Intellect*, than the most curious and artful disposition of Sounds can be to the *Sense*. 'Tis



'Tis true, we want light in this Valley of Darknefs and Night of Ignorance, to discern this Harmony and beautiful conspiracy of things, (which is the true ground of all the Discontent that is in the World ; ) but hereafter, when our Eye-sight shall be cleared and fortified to see our Glorious Maker as he is, we shall then with the Beauty of his *Fate* behold that of his *Providence*, we shall see the deep Plot of this great and wonderful *Drama* laid open and unravel'd, and how even the most Cloudy and Doubtful states of things wind up into Beauty and Harmony : We shall see and be well satisfied, that there is a Geometry in his *Providence*, as well as in his *Creation* ; and that as all things were made, so are they governed too in *Number*, *Weight*, and *Measure*. Then shall we not only patiently and meekly submit to, but with full acquiescence and complacency of Spirit, rejoyce in the accomplishment of the whole Will of God, though it be in the Damnation of our nearest Friends and Relatives. Then shall there be an intire resolution of our Will into the Divine, God shall be all in all, *Ephes. 3. 10.* and his *παντοκρατορ οφια*, his manifold and various Wisdom, though not fully comprehended, yet shall be so much understood, as to be fully justified by all his Children.

In the mean time, till we are in a capacity to judge our selves, we may and ought to repose a firm confidence in the Skill of the Divine Dramatist, and believe implicitly that there is a most incomparable Beauty in the whole Scheme and System of this great Master-piece, though to us who sit in a dark corner of the Theatre, some of its parts seem obscure and perplex'd; that (as the Wise Man expresses it,) *Wisdom reaches from one end to another*, Wisd. 8. 1. and that he has *poured her out upon all his Works*, Eccles. 1. 9.

And is there now any room for such a Passion as Grief or Discontent after such a Consideration as this? Can a Man acting upon this Supposition be so absurd as to be disturb'd at any Accident, to repine under any Condition, to take to heart the loss of any Friend, though another and a better Self, though this whole Happiness were compendiously sum'd up in him, so as to lose all at a Blow; when at the same time he seriously considers, that all things are as well as they can possibly be? Certainly he that is troubled at any Affliction, may well be suspected of one of these two things, either of forgetting that God governs the World, or of charging him with Male Administration. He insinuates by his Grief and Discontentment thus much at least, that he dislikes

likes the order of the Universe, and that if he were placed at the Helm, he would steer its Course after another method ; and does therefore deserve to be remembered of that which *Luther* told *Melancthon*, when troubled that the Reformation did not move on so smoothly as he would have it, *Monendus est Philippus, destinatus esse Rector Mundi* ; *Philip* is to be put in mind that he leave off governing the World.

For certainly were we thoroughly satisfied of the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God in the disposal of all events, were this Perswasion deeply fixed in us, and intimately present with us, that all is for the Best, we should see Argument enough not only for Patience and Contentment, but also for Rejoycing and giving Thanks in all Dispensations ; we should (as *Seneca*, *Epist.* 96. well expresses the Temper of his Wise Man,) *non solum Deo parere, sed & assentiri*, not only submit with resignation to the Divine Will, but approve and imbrace it with full choice, as our best Lot and Portion, and say

\* *Epictetus*. with another excellent Stoick, *Epi*

*ὅτι πᾶσι τὰς ἀνθρώπων ὑποτάσσεται*,

*ἡσυχία*, I will not only endure, but plead for the dispensations of Providence, and justify them to the World. We should not then content our selves with that of the Royal Prophet, *I became dumb and opened not my Mouth,*



*Mouth, because it was thy doing, Psal. 39.* but proceed further, and kiss the Cross even while it oppresses and galls our Shoulders, and go forth to meet our Sufferings, after the example of our Divine Master, who withdrew voluntarily to the Garden where he foreknew he should be apprehended, and there as freely surrendered himself when he might have escaped: We should not so much as wish to have avoided any Calamity; and though we took never so much delight in our Paradise, yet after we heard the Voice of God walking in the Garden, and received his Sentence to depart, we should not endeavour a re-entrance, though we could remove the fiery Sentinel, and prevail with the angry Cherub to sheath his Sword; but should rather thank God for his severe Mercy, and say with the great example of Patience, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord, Job 1. 11.*

There remains yet one Consideration more, and that is the *Paternal* relation of God; he that gives us the bitter Cup, besides the Essential benignity of his nature, has also a near relation to indear him to us; he is our *Father*, and therefore cannot but be very tenderly affected toward us. He Loved us when we were but an *Idea* in his own Understanding, much more does he now, when we have actually participated of his

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Spiritual Nature, and not only so, but of his peculiar likeness too : Add to this, that he has shewn himself to be a Father by infinite Favours and Kindnesses, some of which border almost upon Fondness and Partiality, in so much that they have raised *Envy* in some of the Angels, and *Wonder* in all the rest : For there are things done for Man, which the Angels have long contemplated, and yet still *desire to look into*, 1 *Pet.* 12.

Shall I not then drink the Cup which my Father, this my Father has given me ? My Father who is too full and perfect to need my Misery, though in respect of his Supream Dominion he might to great degrees arbitrarily afflict me ; who is too wise to mistake my true interest, and too good (for he is Essential Goodness, and his very Definition is Love, 1 *John* 4. 8.) to prescribe me a Draught which he knows not to be wholsom for me ? Who has given me all the good I enjoy, and who has parted with more for my sake, than he can possibly take from me in this World ; for he has given me his Beloved Son, the brightness of his Glory and the express Image of his Person, *shall I then receive Good*, so great a Good at his hands, *and not receive Evil*, *Job* 3. 10. Shall I refuse the Cup which my Father, this my Father has given me ? No, may the considering Sufferer say, I will welcome the sharpest

sharpest Arrow that comes from his Quiver, I will rest heartily satisfied with his severest dispensations, and though he kill me; yet will I trust in him.

Let us then at all times and on all occasions with all Patience, Meekness, Contentedness and Resignation of Spirit, be Passively as well as Actively conformable to the Divine Will, and demean our selves as becomes Children under the Chastisement of so Wise and so Good a Father; let us not only with calmness endure, but with content and satisfaction approve and justify all his Dispensations; so will he justify and acquit us hereafter, and to the present benefit of our *Affliction*, superadd a Reward of our *Patience*, and reveal to us such an excellent Glory with which the Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared.

To which God of his Infinite Mercy conduct us all, *AMEN*.

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## A Discourse concerning the Folly of Covetousness.

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Luke 12. 20. *But God said unto him,  
Thou Fool--*

**T**IS somewhat strange to consider that Wisdom should be a thing *desired* by *all*, and highly *pretended* to by the *most*, and yet that Men should betray their Folly in nothing more than in their Judgments concerning Wisdom ; and yet this is the frequent as well as unhappy fate of the many Pretenders to Wisdom that are in the World, who in nothing take such absurd measures as in this. We shew indeed enough of our Weakness and Ignorance in the search of *Nature*, and in what we call our *Philosophy* : We live among Mysteries and Riddles, and there is not one thing that comes in at our Senses, but what baffles our Understandings ; but tho' (as the Wise Man complains, *Wisd. 9. 16.*) *hardly do we guess aright at the things that are upon Earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us ; yet find them out*  
we

we do in some measure, and are seldom so very much out in our Judgments, as to mistake in *Extremities*, and take one contrary for another: 'Tis very rare that we take the vertue of a Plant to be Hot, when 'tis extremely Cold, and he must be a very mean *Botanic* now, that shall gather Poison instead of Pot-herbs; and yet this we often do in the conduct of Life, and in the great Ends and Measures of it. Here we often mistake one contrary for another, Evil for Good, Darkness for Light, and Folly for Wisdom. We do not only act foolishly, (for that were something tolerable, would we but acknowledge and be ashamed of our weakness,) but we back this Folly with another, applaud and justify our absurd measures, and think our selves Wise, not only while we are Fools, but for that very thing wherein we are so.

The generality of Men place their Wisdom in that which is directly their Folly, and their greatest Wisdom in their greatest Folly; they lay deep Plots for shallow Interests, and are very slight and superficial in their Contrivances about things of real Moment and Consequence; they work out a frame of little Designs, with as much Industry, Art and Wariness, as the laborious Spider weaves her fine-wrought Web, and to as much purpose, to catch a *Fly*, to bring about a *Trifle*,



when the same, perhaps half the labour and thoughtfulness would have served for the securing a weighty and substantial Interest : And yet when they have done this, they think they have been very Shrewd and Politick, and compassed a very notable Point, and are Proud of their little Atchievement, and fancy the Title of *Wise* as much their due, as if pronounced so by the *Oracle*, and as sure and well established, as if *their* Wisdom as well as that of *Solomon*, had built her House upon Seven Pillars, little thinking all the while that he that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh them to Scorn, that the Lord shall have them in Derision : *Psal. 2. 4.* That God, whose Ways are not as our Ways, nor his Thoughts like our Thoughts, has already weighed them in a truer Ballance than that wherein they weigh themselves, and finds them wanting in what they chiefly pretended to, and charges them with downright Folly and Madnes. For this was the case of the Rich Man in the Parable, the Fruitfulness of his Ground had put him upon a new Expedient, and he was very busie and thoughtful within himself how to find room to dispose of his Goods ; what shall I do, says he, because I have no room where to bestow my Fruits ? The Poor Man it seems was as much straitned in his Plenty, as other Men use to be in the extreamest Poverty ;

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*What shall I do?* The very Language of those who are reduced to *Straits* ; Do ? Why, give the overplus to the Poor ; and that thou mayest not be so overstock'd again another Year, part with a good piece of Land, and build an *Hospital*. No, says he, I understand better things than so, this will I do, I will pull down my Barns and build greater, and there will I bestow (not on the Poor,) all my Fruits and my Goods ; and I will say to my Soul, Soul thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Ease, Eat, Drink and be Merry. This was his Resolution, and a Wise one too as he thought, applauding himself as much in the Wisdom of his Contrivance, as in the Fruitfulness of his Ground : *But God said unto him, Thou Fool—*

It is here supposed, that the Rich Man thought he had done wisely, and proceeded by the best Measures of Prudence and Discretion, in that the Judgment of God is here by way of Opposition set against his ; he it seems and God, were of two different Apprehensions, *But God said unto him, —* From the Words therefore I shall in the First place observe, how vastly the Judgment of God differs from that of Men, and particularly that what we count Wisdom here, is Folly with him : And since the Judgment of God it always infallible, and according to the

truth and reality of things, I shall therefore in the Second place consider the great Folly of what God here condemns as such ; First, Of Sin in general ; Secondly, Of placing our Happiness and Content in the good things of this World : And here I shall consider the great Folly of Covetousness, and particularly of the Covetous Rich Man in the Text.

And First, I observe how vastly different the Judgment of God is from that of Men, and particularly that what we count Wisdom here, is Folly with him. *My Thoughts* says God by the Prophet, *are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways my Ways ; for as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my Ways higher than your Ways, and my Thoughts than your Thoughts, Isa. 5. 5.* Indeed the disproportion is very great between Earth and Heaven, between the Point and the Circumference of so vast a Circle, and yet this does but faintly shadow out the mighty disproportion that is between the Measures of Men and the Ways of God ; for the difference is as great, as between Truth and Falshood, which are removed from each other by an unmeasurable distance. There's more Truth than we are easily aware of in that fancy of *Homer*, that the Gods call things by other Names than we do ; so far are they from thinking our *Thoughts*, that they do not so much as speak in our *Phrase*.  
Not

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Not only the Thoughts of God, are above our reach, but even his very Words are ἀρρητὰ ῥήματα, Words that cannot be utter'd by a Mortal Tongue, nor understood by any *imbodyed* Understanding ; there's an unimaginable difference even in the very *Nomenclature* as well as the *Logick* of Earth and Heaven, for God dwells in *unapproachable* Light and Glory, nay he himself as St. *John* tells us, is a pure and unmix'd Light, a Light which has no Darkness, and to which nothing is dark, but all things open and naked. He therefore pierces through the very *Essences* of things, sees them all in their proper Colours, and calls them all by their proper Names. He has before him in one simple view, the whole *Field* of Truth ; nay he is very Truth himself, and consequently can no more be deceived in his Judgment of things, than he can cease to be what he is. But we, though we see in his Divine Light, yet we have it reflected to us through false Mediums, and mingled with Clouds and Mists, and thick Darkness. We look upon Truth as we do upon the Face of the Setting Sun, through a gross and fallacious *Atmosphere*, and by a *Refracted* Ray, which makes it appear where it is not ; for we see through a Veil of Flesh those dim *Spectacles* of the Soul, and the Vapours of the Body cloud the Understanding, and blunt the Edge of  
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the Mind. We seldom discern things as they truly are, and when we do, we can hardly keep true to the Judgment which we have once rightly made, but are oftentimes by the intervening *Eclipses* of sudden Passion, actually ignorant of what we habitually know, and then act as foolishly and absurdly, as if we had never known it. These are the accidental Disadvantages we labour under, besides the finiteness of our understandings, which even in the Perfection of our Nature are bounded within a narrow compass. And since this is the Case between God and us, the Judgment which God makes of things, must needs be vastly different from the Sentiments of Men ; for if the Judgment of one Man be so widely different from that of another, if the Conceptions of Philosophers be so far removed from the fancy of the Vulgar, and the Measures of an Experienced Statesman be so quite otherwise than those of a poor Home-bred Peasant, how vastly different must the Measures and Judgments of God be from those of Men, who sees Darkness even in the Angels of Light, and charges the loftiest Seraph with Folly ! Certainly so very different, that they are for the most part quite contrary ; insomuch, that what we think *Truth*, and withall dogmatically pronounce as such, and perhaps blind with an *Anathema*

*thema* ; God in the mean while judges to be Error ; and what we take to be Wisdom, he esteems to be Folly : And I doubt most of our Wisdom is of such a *Stamp*, as will not *pass* above in the Regions of Light, however current it may be here below by the advantage of this our *Night* and *Obscurity* : And the Apostle says plainly of the Wisdom of the World, (which indeed is the Wisdom of the *most*,) that 'tis Foolishness with God.

But of this we shall be better convinc'd by some particular Instances, whereof there are a Multitude, but I shall briefly touch upon a few. And First, as to the frame of the *Natural* World, some Mathematicians and Naturalists have quarrel'd with the Geometry and Contrivance of it ; one dislikes the Situation and Motion of the Sun, in making some Countries so very Hot, and some so very Cold, and in occasioning so frequent *Eclipses*. Another quarrels with the conduct of the Weather, and can by no means think it well that a full Cloud should empty it self upon the barren Sand, or upon the Sea, when in the mean time many a rich Ground is almost starved for want of Relief from Heaven ; and he can as little reconcile it to wise Administration, that the hopes of the promising Year should be crush'd in Pieces by the rude Arrest of an unseasonable Frost.

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Another wonders to what purpose there should be such vast numbers of little Insects, why there should be any such thing as *Poison*, and why among Fishes, the Greater should prey upon the Less, and why those which are Food for us, should be so thick set with little Bones ; and he can never forgive Nature for the Luxuriancy and easie growth of Weeds, when choice Flowers are hardly brought up even with Labour and Care. But to all this and the like, the Judgment of God stands directly opposed, who upon a Solemn Review of his Works pronounced all things good that he had made, and found not one *Erratum* in the whole Book of Nature.

Thus again as to the Administration of the *Moral* World, we don't like the System of this neither, but are wont to be dissatisfied ; First, That there should be any such thing as *Evil* in it ; this has been censured as a great Flaw by the whole School of Philosophers, and the most favourable Plea they could advance for it, was to resolve it into *Necessity*, and the Invincible *Stubbornness* of Matter ; as much as to say, God could not help it. And those who could be pretty well reconciled to the *being* of Evil in the World, would yet by no means indure to think that the greatest share of it should light upon good Men. This was ever an un-

unanswerable Scandal, and an unmoveable Objection ; and yet 'tis most certain, that if God did not judge it best upon the whole matter, that there should be Evil in the World, and that the most of it too, should fall upon those who deserved the least, he would never suffer either the one or the other.

There is yet another thing in relation to the Moral World, which lies very cross upon our Minds, and that is the Adjournment of the full Administration of Justice to another World ; we would fain see it in this, and are for an immediate and visible distinction and separation to be made between Good and Bad, between the Tares and the Wheat ; and because we see no such difference made, we are apt to censure the Order, if not to question the very Being of Divine Providence. But it seems the Judgment of God is against ours, he thinks it not so well that the Tares should now be separated from the Wheat, but that *both should grow together till the Harvest*, Mat. 13. 10.

Thus again as to the *Matter* of the Christian Faith, and the *manner* of planting it in the World, which the Apostle in one Word calls the *Preaching of the Cross* ; this we know was a Stumbling Block to the *Jews*, and Foolishness of the *Wise Greeks*, who were than the *Virtuoso's* of the World ; and yet



yet we are told by an inspired Pen, that 'twas both the *Power* and the *Wisdom* of God; 1 Cor. 1. 24.

Thus again as to the Government of the Christian Church, even those who have received the Christian Faith, are not altogether satisfied with that; for many of us are apt to think that Christ would have made much better Provision than he has for the good of the Church, if he had constituted in it an *Infallible Guide*, and Visible Judge of Controversies, by whom all Difficulties might be cleared, and all Disputes ended, which now so confound and divide the Christian World; I say many who do not believe that there is any such Constitution, are yet apt to think and say, that 'twere a thing much to be wish'd it had been so, and that 'twould have been a great deal better so than otherwise; and yet God we see in his Wisdom has not thought fit to have it so.

Thus again as to the condition of Human Life, we commonly imagin it would be mightily for our Advantage to have a prospect of *Futarities*, and to foresee what shall happen to us hereafter; and accordingly we are very curious to taste of the Fruit of *this* Tree of Knowledge, and to pry into the obscure Manuscript of Destiny; and some are so impatient, that they will have recourse to the Devil for such Discoveries rather than  
fail.

fail. And yet we see God in his manifold Wisdom has thought fit to *Seal* up this Book of Futurities from our Eyes, and will not trust us with so *dangerous* a piece of Knowledge.

Thus again Lastly, We many of us think it a great Point of Wisdom to heap up Wealth, to get Honours and Preferments, to raise Families, to perpetuate a Name; and we are hugely satisfied with our good Policy and Discretion, if we can secure to our selves a little Portion of this dirty Planet, this little Spot, this Point, though we pay for it, not only the Price of Labour and Care, Contempt and Disgrace, Danger and continual Fear, but even the great Price of our Future Inheritance; and part with our Religion, and our very Souls in the Exchange. This we oftentimes think Wisdom to do for a *little* of the World; whereas in the Judgment of God, to gain the *whole* upon such Terms; would be but an ill Bargain. *What shall it profit a Man, says our Saviour, to gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul?* Yea, but there are some, and never so many as in this Age, that think this no such unprofitable Merchandize, but are very well content to sell Heaven for Earth, Happiness for Vanity, and will readily part with the great Reversion of another World for a Turf of Ground in present Possession. This is the way

way of them, and they think they do well, and that they may say of themselves all the while what the Wise King did in the midst of all his sensual Indulgencies, *Ecc. 2. 9. also my Wisdom remained with me.* But however these Men applaud themselves in their extraordinary Reach and Policy, God in the mean time has another Opinion of their Conduct, and will say to every one of them, what he did to the Rich Man in our Parable, *Thou Fool.*

And now whereas the Judgment of God is ever Infallible, and according to the truth and reality of things, I am hence led in the Second Place to consider the great Folly of what God here condemns as such ; the thing condemned, is the Conduct of the Rich Man, which he himself thought Wise, but God thought very Foolish ; and the First ground of the Charge wherewith God taxes him, was the *Sinfulness* of it ; he was a *Fool* because a *Sinner*. I shall therefore in the First place reflect a little upon the Folly of Sin in general : Sin and Folly, Sinner and Fool, are Words in Scripture, especially in the Writings of *Solomon*, of a parallel Signification, and are indifferently used one for the other : And the Schools of Morality insinuate the same in that common Aphorism of theirs, *every Sinner is ignorant.* Πᾶς ὁ μὴ γινώσκων ἁμαρταν, says the Socratical Proverb. Indeed Sin has  
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its Birth in Folly, and every Step of its Progress is Folly, and its Conclusion is in Folly; there is its Rise, there is its Advance, and there is its End: But this will appear more distinctly from the consideration of these Two things. First, The absurdity and madness of the Choice which every Sinner makes. Secondly, The Error and Mistake that must necessarily precede in his Judgment before he makes it: These Two things, wherein is comprized the whole Folly of Sin, have been by me already considered

\* elsewhere; but because it is a Consideration of such an uncommon importance, I shall rather present it here again to the Reader with a little Alteration, than refer him to it.

\* *Reason and Religion.* p. 250.

As for the Absurdity of the Sinners Choice, 'tis the greatest that can be imagined; for what is it that he chuses? 'Tis to do that which he must and certainly will *repent* of, and wish he had never done, either in this World for its *Illness* and Sinfulness, or in the next for its *sad Effects* and Consequences. 'Tis to despise the Authority, Power, Justice, and Goodness of God; 'tis to transgress his Commands which are good and equitable, and in keeping of which, there is *present* as well as *future* Reward; 'tis to act against the frame of his Rational Nature, and the Divine Law of his Mind; 'tis



to disturb the Order and Harmony of the Creation, and by extra-lineal motions to violate the Sacred Interest of Society : 'Tis lastly, to incur the Anger of an Omnipotent and Just God, and to hazard falling off from his Supream Good and the last end of his Being, and the being ruin'd in his best Interest to all Eternity. All this the Sinner partly actually incurs, and partly puts to the hazard in the Commission of any one Sin. And for what is all this ? Is it for any considerable Interest, for any thing that bears something of Proportion, and may pretend to Competition and a rival weight in the opposite Scale of the Ballance ? No, 'tis only for a Shadow, for a Trifle, for the Gratification of some baser Appetite, for the Acquirement of some little Interest, which has nothing to divert us from adhering to that which is truly our *Best*, but only that poor Advantage of being present, though at the same time its *Vanity* be present with it.

And now is this a Choice for a Wise Man, for a Man of common Sense ? Nay, is it a Choice for a Man of any Sense at all, for one in his right Wits to make ? Is there a better Demonstration to be had of a Man's being a Fool or Mad than this ? No certainly, and were it not for the Customariness of the thing, and that too many are concern'd, this would be thought a sufficient Reason why

why a Man should be *beg'd* for a *Fool*, or sent to *Bedlam* : For if Absurdity of Choice be any Argument of Folly, the Sinner is certainly no common Fool, there being no Choice so absurd, so unaccountable as his.

But his Folly will further appear, if we consider Secondly, the Error and Mistake that must necessarily precede in his Judgment, before he does or can make such a Choice ; all Sin is founded upon Ignorance and Mistake, for as 'tis impossible to chuse Evil as Evil in general, so is it no less impossible to chuse any *particular* kind of Evil as Evil ; and consequently 'tis impossible to chuse the Evil of *Sin* as such : The Devil himself (as Abstract a Sinner as he is,) can't love Sin as Sin. If therefore it be chosen, it must be chosen under the appearance of Good, and it can have this appearance no otherwise than as considered as a lesser Evil, (for that's the only way whereby an Evil may appear Good or Eligible) and so it must be considered before it be chosen. He therefore that chuses Sin, considers it at the instant of Commission as a lesser Evil, and therein consists his Error and Mistake ; he is either Habitually or Actually Ignorant, he either has not the Habitual Knowledge of all those things which would preserve him in his Duty, or at least he has not the Actual Consideration of them ; for 'tis *that*

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which must bring him to *Repentance*, there being no Consideration beyond this : And 'tis impossible a Man should Sin with the very same Thoughts, Convictions and Considerations about him, as he has when he *Repents*. This I say is no more possible, than for a Ballance to move two contrary ways with the same Weight, and in the same Posture. He therefore that Sins, wants *that* Consideration at least to keep him *in* his Duty, which when he Repents brings him *to* it ; and is therefore Ignorant and Mistaken.

The Sum of this matter lies in this form of Argument, Whoever thinks Sin a lesser Evil, is mistaken in his Judgment ; but whoever commits Sin, does then think it a lesser Evil : Therefore whoever commits Sin is mistaken in his Judgment. So great is the folly of Sin, both in reference to the Absurdity of the Choice, and to the Error and Mistake of the Chuser ; and so great reason has every Sinner to take up that Confession of the Psalmist, *Psal. 73. So Foolish was I and Ignorant, and even as a Beast before thee.*

And thus far of the Folly of Sin in general ; I come now in the Second place to the other ground of the Charge, where I am to consider the folly of placing our Happiness and Content in the good things of this World, and of that particular sort of Earthly-Mindedness which we call *Covetousness*.  
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It is certainly a very great folly to place our Happiness in any *Created* Good, even in the very Best of the Works of God ; there is nothing even in *Heaven* that's *Created*, which can be our Happiness ; not the Discourses of Angels, not the Love of Seraphims, not the Musick of Allelujahs. And therefore the Psalmist excludes all the Creatures even in *Heaven*, as well as in Earth from being the Objects of his Happiness ; *Psal. 73. Whom have I in Heaven but thee?* Says he, 'twould be a great folly therefore to make any *Created* Good our Happiness, even in the very Region of Blessedness. But then to place it in any good that this World, this Sediment, and Sink of the Creation can afford, is such a degree of Sottishness and Stupidity, as did not Experience convince us that there are such Fools, one would hardly think incident to a Rational Creature, for it plainly argues that we are grossly ignorant of one of these Two things, either of our selves, or of the things of the World ; we are either ignorant of the Dignity and Excellency of our Natures, of the Designs and Ends of our Creation, and of the Strengths and Capacities of our Appetites which are to be satisfied with nothing less than Infinite ; or if we do know and consider all this of our *selves*, then we are so much the more ignorant of the *World* about us, to think that there is



any thing to be had in this Circle of Vanity to satisfy the importunity of such Hungry and Capacious Appetites.

So far indeed is any thing in this World from being able to afford us *Happiness* and Satisfaction, that 'tis well if it can give us *Entertainment*, and sweeten the otherwise insipid, and to some very bitter Draught of Life : The Wisest Enquirer into the Capacities of Nature will hardly allow it so much as that ; but says of all here, that 'tis not only *Vanity*, but also *Vexation* of Spirit ; and if we do by an extraordinary Fortune meet with any thing in this World that can a little cool and allay the heat of our great Thirst, and refresh the drought of our Spirit, yet we are assured by our Saviour who well understood the World, though he enjoyed but little of it, *John 4. 13.* that *whosoever drinks of this Water shall thirst again* ; and we all find by repeated Experiences, that 'tis so, and our Reason tells us it must be so, considering the vast, the infinite disproportion between the best things of this World, yea of the whole Creation, and the largeness, the immensity of our Appetites and Capacities, which are a plain Demonstration that we were neither made for them, nor they for us, and that here is neither our Good nor our Evil.

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And what a Folly then is it to place our Happiness, and take up our Rest in such things as these against the Confession and experimental Verdict of the Wifest of Men, against the exprefs Declaration and Asseveration of God who made both the World and us, and knows the exact Proportion that all his Works have to each other ; and that a Barn full of Corn can never satisfy the Hunger of a Soul, against the united experience of all Men ever since *Adam*, nay, and against our own Experience too, which will witness to us, if we but ask her, that we never *enjoyed* but were *disappointed*, and found our Souls empty when our Arms were full ; nay, and against the Answer of our Reason too, which satisfies us of the *Necessity* of what our Experience confesses to be *true*, and that as it has ever been so, so it ever will and must be so: I say, what a desperate, incorrigible Fool must he be, who after all this, will yet dream of a Heaven upon Earth, and place his Happiness in the good of this World ! The short is, there is no Folly or Disappointment like that of being mistaken in ones *End* ; and of all Ends, none is so foolishly mistaken as our *Last* End, and this can never be more foolishly mistaken, than when 'tis placed in the things of *this World*. This therefore is a very great instance of Folly and Stupidity, and to him that is guilty of

it, whatever he be for Wit and Parts in other Matters of lesser consequence, God justly may, and will say, *Thou Fool*.

And now if there be so much of Folly in *Centring* in this World, which consists of great variety of Good, and wherein there is a great *Latitude* of Enjoyment, what a Folly must it then be to straiten our Happiness within the *narrow* compass of *One* or *Two* of its meanest Objects, and to set up our Rest in a full Purse, or a full Barn, or in a few Acres of Ground ! And this the Covetous Man does ; though he be called a *Worldly* Man, yet 'tis not the World at large, but a little of it, and the worst of it that is the Mistress of his Heart : He is such a Fool to think that his very *Life consists* in the Abundances of things which he possesses, and so he makes Gold his Hope, and says to the Fine Gold, *Thou art my Confidence*. He places his End in these things, and so is guilty of all the common Folly and Absurdity of those who place their Happiness in any of the good things of this World ; only there is this one peculiar aggravation on his Side, that whereas the Ambitious Man, though he makes Honour and Preferment his Happiness, yet he enjoys it when he has it ; and so does the Voluptuary by his Pleasures ; and by this means though they lose their true End, yet they have something in Exchange. In the mean

mean time, the *Covetous* Wretch, though he makes Wealth his End, yet he when he has it, enjoys no more than he did when it lay hid in the Bowels of the Earth, and so goes to the Devil for *nothing*. For nothing did I say? 'Tis worse than so, for though he has nothing of the *Enjoyment*, yet he won't bate himself an Ace of the *Trouble*, but endures all the Pain and Anxiety that *Careful* Days and Sleepless Nights can give, and so has his Hell here, and hereafter too.

The truth is, there is more Depth and Mystery in the *Folly* of Covetousness, than in any the most profound *Wisdom* in the World; other Follies of Human Life, though they are not to be *cured* any more than this, yet they may be *accounted* for; and though they do *overpower* and enslave the Mind, yet they do not *baffle* it. But this is a Disease that has such variety of uncertain Symptoms, that 'tis hard to know what cause to ascribe it to; the Theory of it is as difficult as the Cure, and we can only say, that the Soul is not well under it, that 'tis a *Disease*. 'Tis Folly enough one would think, for one Man to place his Happiness in such a Trifle as a piece of glittering Dirt, and to have one's Soul dwell among Sacks of Corn, and Bags of Money, and to be always craving, heaping, counting and admiring; this I say one would think were Nonsense enough,  
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considering the vileness of the Treasure it self, the Providence of God, the shortness and uncertainty of Life, the transitoriness of this World, the fashion of which is always passing away ; and considering withal the very little that Nature requires for her satisfaction. But yet it were something tolerable if the Wretch would but be perswaded to make use of what he has, and to enjoy like a *Man*, what he desires and admires like a *Fool*. But to see an Old *shaking* Miser among his Bags, like a Scare-Crow in a Field of Corn, to keep others away from what he has no power to make use of himself ; to see him hovering and brooding over his Heaps, and bringing forth nothing ; to see him daily pay *Religious* Visits to his *Mammon*, and to have his Belly empty when his Coffers are full, sure the Philosopher that laugh'd to see an Ass eat Thistles, might well split his Sides at such a Spectacle as this.

*Thou Fool!* If thou dost not want so much Wealth, why dost thou desire it, and take so much Pains to get it ? And if thou dost, why dost thou not use and enjoy it ? But this is the monstrous Folly of the Covetous Wretch, he first desires Absurdly, and then is more absurd in not enjoying what he desires ; he is every whit as Poor when he has, as when he has not ; he is good to no body, but worst of all to himself : In one word,  
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he is a continual Torment to his own Mind, and Laughing-stock to the World, whom he diverts with his Folly, the only thing wherein he is a Benefactor.

It were an infinite undertaking to expose to view the whole Absurdity of Covetousness, which is a *World of Folly*, as the Tongue is of *Iniquity*; only there is one notorious instance of it, which in justice to my Subject, I cannot well pass over: And that is, that it is a Vice of this peculiar Quality from all others, to be then most strong and prevailing, when there is least cause for it, and least Temptation to it; for then generally are Men most Covetous.

1. When they have most Wealth.

2. When they have least Time.

1. *When they have most Wealth*: This one would think should be the proper Cure of Covetousness, as a full Draught of Water is of Thirst; for this is what the Covetous Man desires, this is the Mistress of his Affections, and the delight of his Eyes, that which he has so long and so passionately wish'd for, and promised himself so much Happiness in; and therefore when he is possessed of this, one would expect that he should be satisfied, and at rest, as other Lovers are when they are come to the enjoyment of their Desires. But the case is so far otherwise, that he is more deeply plunged in Covetousness

ness now than ever, and is the more *Empty* for being *Full*; and there is nothing more common than to see Men who were of a frank and liberal Disposition when they had little or nothing to support them, to commence Covetous in an instant upon the Bequest of a rich Legacy, or the sudden fall of an Estate. Strange, that Men should *contract* their *Spirits* upon the *inlargement* of their *Fortunes*! Many indeed are the Temptations and Snares of Wealth; but of all Vices one would think it should not dispose Men to Covetousness, but rather be an Antidote against it: And yet so it is, Men are generally most enslaved to this Vice, when they have really least Temptation to it, and might most easily be above it, that is, when they have *most Wealth*. Which indeed is a more strange and unaccountable *Appearance* to consider, than either the Attraction of the Loadstone, or the Ebbing and Flowing of the Sea; and yet 'tis as strange to consider, that Men are also most *Covetous*.

2. *When they have least time.* Indeed when Men are in the Morning of Life, and have a long Prospect of many Years before them, they have then some Temptation to be Covetous, and something to plead for their being so; for they may then live long enough to *enjoy* what by their Frugality they can get, and considering the many *Contingencies*



gencies of Human Life, to *want* what at present they enjoy. But when the Day of Life is far spent, and the Night is at hand, when a Man has but a short Prospect before him, and his Sun is just ready to touch upon its great *Horizon*, than one would think he should have but little heart to be Covetous; and yet then is the time when Men are most of all so; for Covetousness is the proper Vice, or rather Disease of *Old Age*, and is almost as constant an Attendant of it, as Grey Hairs, or a Trembling Hand. When all other Vices leave the Man, as no longer fit for their Service; when even *Lust* it self, the last of the black Train has bid him adieu, then Covetousness seizes him, as if it designed to have him wholly to it self, without Partner or Competitor, to domineer over him with an *absolute* Tyranny. Strange, that a Man should be most solicitous for Provision by the way, when he is almost at his Journey's end, within view of Home! *Thou Fool!* If thou must be Covetous, take a proper Condition, and a right Time for it, and be so either when thou art *Poor*, or when thou art *Young*; when thou hast a Temptation to it, and a Pretence for it. But it seems Absurdity, and Nonsense is so far of the very *Essence* of this Mysterious Vice, that then Men are most addicted to it, when in all Reason and Expectation they should be

Proof



Proof against it ; nay, one would think even naturally incapable of it, when they are *Rich*, and when they are *Old*.

And now I think there is sufficient ground for the Charge wherewith God taxes the Rich Man ; he might well be called Fool, as a *Sinner*, as an *Earthly-Minded* Person, and particularly as being *Covetous*. But let us now consider the particular circumstances of his Covetousness, and we shall find that his Folly was of a nature very Extraordinary ; the Text says, that *the Ground of a certain Rich Man brought forth plentifully* ; now 'twould be expected, that upon this, his very next Thought should be to return God Thanks for the Fruitfulness of his ground, if it were for no other Reason, but that he might have the like Success again the next Season : No, but instead of that, he immediately thought within himself what he should do, because he had no room where to bestow his Fruits ; there was the first Instance of his Folly. Well, but in case this unseasonable and too early Thoughtfulness of his had but put him upon doing some good thing with his Abundance, 'twould have been pretty tolerable yet, and there would have been some amends for the *ill-timing* it, before he had returned his Thanks to God : No, but he thought *thus* within himself, I will pull down my Barns, and build greater, and

and there will I bestow all my Fruits and my Goods : *All* my Fruits and my Goods ; he designs you see to ingross all to himself, and to remember neither God nor the Poor, to let no part of it go to any Pious or Charitable use ; and there's another instance of his Folly. But after all, perhaps he does not mean to place his *End* and chief Happiness in his full Granary, but only to use it as a *lesser* good, and as relating to the Conveniencies of the *Body*, and the gratification of the *Animal* Life : No, but his *Folly* proceeds further than so, I will say to my *Soul*, says he, *Soul* thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Ease, Eat, Drink, and be Merry : A very noble Soliloquy indeed ! That ever a Man should be so much a Brute and a Sot, as to make a full Barn the good of his *Soul* ! of his *Soul* who must seek her *Happiness* from the same Hand whence she had her *Being*, and can be satisfied only by him who is Absolute Perfection. This certainly was a strange extravagance of *Folly*, and yet even this has a further Aggravation yet ; for had this Provision of his been indeed for *many Years*, (as he fancied,) there would have been more Cause and Pretence for the great Complacency and Satisfaction he took in it. But little did the poor Fool think upon what Contingencies this Project of his depended, and how precarious and uncer-

uncertain the Lease of his Life was, much less that *that very Night* his Soul should be required of him ; and yet this was a very obvious Consideration, though in the heat and hurry of his Contrivances he was not at leisure to take it in his way. • And this is the lamentable Fate of all Covetous Men, they are so busie in making haste to be Rich, that they *overlook* the *Grave*, notwithstanding that they are continually pouring upon the *Earth*. But not to consider a thing so obvious, is a great piece of dotishness and stupidity ; and yet to consider it, and go on in heaping up Riches without Reason and without End, is much worse.

And thus have we seen the whole procedure of the *Rich Man*, (if he may now be allowed that Name,) and the incomparable Folly of it, and in him the Folly of all Covetous Persons, who yet in one respect, do generally exceed their Original in the Parable ; for he, though he had resign'd up his Heart and Soul to his Wealth, yet he was so wise as to know when he had enough, and when 'tis time to give over, retreat, and take his Ease. But *our Misers* never know when they have sufficient, but drudge on to the very last Minute, and Dye in their Slavery ; and are therefore the greater Fools.

What therefore remains, but that we take other *Objects* of *Content* ; that we place  
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not our Happiness in the things of this World, nor labour for that which is not *Bread*; that we lay not up Treasures for our selves upon Earth, but rather endeavour to be Rich towards God; that we do not plunge our selves so deep into the World, and the Pleasures of this Life, this short Life, as to forget the days of Darkness which shall be many? Above all, let us take care that we do not take any thing of the World to be the good of our *Souls*, much less so far as for the sake of any Honour, Profit or Preferment to be false to the infinitely dearer Interest of our Religion, and the Cause of God and his Church; lest when we begin to Pride and Applaud our Selves in our Wisdom, and withal fancy that even Posterity shall praise our Saying, God in the mean time should say to any of us, as he did to the Rich Man in our Parable, *Thou Fool*.

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A Discourse concerning the Consideration of God, and of the Divine Presence.

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*Psal. 16. 9. I have set the Lord always before me.*

**A**ND 'twere Happy we could all do so ; we should then certainly be more Pure and Uncorrupt in our Thoughts and Intentions, more Spiritual and Elevated in our Affections, and more Orderly and Regular in our Actions, whether in our Retirements, or upon the open Stage ; we should demean our selves with more care and exactness, both towards God, our Neighbour and our Selves ; we should *lead* our Lives with more Innocence, and *leave* them with more Courage and Chearfulness than we generally do.

The Words, as indeed the whole Psalm, seem immediately to concern the Person and the Condition of Christ, and to be chiefly intended to express that steddy, constant and actual Consideration which he had of the  
*Power*

*Power and Veracity* of God, to whom he was not so intimately and mysteriously united, but that he endeavoured to be more intimate and familiar with him, and if possible, to place him in a nearer view, by the Arts of Attention and Recollection, by the most actual and awaken'd Application of Mind. This, as we have great reason to think, was his constant Practice and Exercise all his Life long, but especially about that Dark and Cloudy Period of it, when he was entering into the Troubles of his Passion; then he had occasion to make use of all the Aids and Succours both of Reason and Grace; particularly to renew and reinforce his Considerations of the Power and Veracity of God, that he would not leave his Soul in Hell, (in the State of Separation from his Body,) nor suffer his Holy One to see Corruption. Then therefore he set himself more industriously to Contemplate the Perfections of God, especially those of his Power and Veracity; and from hence he drew Arguments of Consolation for his Support, under all the Terrors and Afflictions of his great Agony, *I have set God always before me; because he is at my Right Hand, I shall not be moved.*

But I shall discourse upon the Words with greater Latitude, and in treating of them, shall concern my self about these Two things.

First, To shew what it is to set God always before one ; or how many ways we may be said to set God before us.

Secondly, To represent the many and great Advantages arising from each ; and what an Excellent Art, and Spiritual Expedient it is for Holy Living, thus to set God always before us.

Now as to the First, to set God always before us, in the general to have him ever present in our Thoughts and Meditations, under some Capacity or Consideration or other ; present to our Thoughts not by way of *Essence* only, (for that he necessarily is, and we cannot possibly exclude him thence,) but also by way of *Object*, when we attend to him, and reflect upon him under some Qualification or other, either absolute, or in relation to us : And in this there is great variety, even as much as there is in the several Attributes and Perfections of God ; but I shall consider only those that influence our Practice, and serve to the Direction of our Manners. Now in Relation to this, there are Three very excellent ways of setting God before us, as the *Supream Good*, as a *Pattern*, and as an *Observer*.

First, We may set God before us as the *Supream Good* ; this we do when we Contemplate the natural and absolute Perfection of his Essence, that universal Plenitude of his, where-

whereby he contains all that is Good, Lovely and Excellent, all things that are requisite to the compleating of a most Perfect and Sovereign Being, that may be infinitely and unchangeably Happy in himself, and whereby he may become apt to be the greatest Good to his Creatures, the true end of Man, the Object of his Happiness, and the last Centre of all his Desires: This is to set God before us as the Supream Good.

Secondly, We may set God before us as a *Pattern*; this we do when we Contemplate the *Moral Nature* of God, those imitable Perfections of his, which answer to those Vertues and good Dispositions of Mind which he requires from us, and which he contributes also to work in us by the Graces of his Spirit: Such are that universal *Sanctity* and Holiness of his Nature and Will, whereby all his Actions become Pure and Right, whereby *the Lord is Righteous in all his Ways, and Holy in all his Works, Psal. 145. 17.* His *Goodness*, wherein are comprehended all the Heights and Depths, and the whole Length and Breadth of the Love, the Kindness, the Mercy, the Grace, the Benignity and Bounty of God, that infinite diffusiveness of his Nature, whereby he is as it were carried out of, and beyond himself, to Communicate the good that is in him to his Creatures, according to their several Proportions and Capacities.



cities. His *Justice*, whereby he deals uprightly and equally with all his Creatures, and renders to every one his own, according to their Works, Good or Bad, without any Partiality or Respect of Persons. His *Truth*, whereby all his Revelations are exactly correspondent and conformable. First, to his own Mind, and then to the Nature of the things themselves, so that he can neither be deceived, nor deceive. His *Faithfulness*, whereby he most assuredly performs whatever he has Promised or Threatned ; but more especially is his Faithfulness remarked in Scripture, for the Performance of his *Promises*, there being a Right acquired from these by the Persons to whom they are made, which is not in Threatnings ; and accordingly 'twould be a greater breach of Fidelity, to deny the one, than not to execute the other. And therefore the Scripture commending the Faithfulness of God, restrains it chiefly to his Promise ; according to that of the Author to the *Hebrews*, *He is Faithful that Promised*, Heb. 10. 23. Lastly, when we Contemplate his *Sincerity*, which consists in his candid, open and ingenuous dealing with the Sons of Men, in that he never thinks nor designs any thing contrary to what he Reveals, either by Word or Deed, in opposition to all Tricks, Juglings, Double-dealings, Hypocrisy and the like.

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These are those Vertues and Perfections which constitute the *Moral* Nature of God, and when we propose these duly and sincerely to our Meditation, as they are Excellencies in the Divine Nature, we may be then said to set God before us as a *Pattern*; I say as they are Excellencies in the Divine Nature, otherwise the formality of the thing will be changed: For if, for Instance, I consider the Justice of God, not as 'tis a Moral Excellence in him, but only as an Instrument of Evil to my self; I do not then set God before me as a *Pattern*, but as an *Avenger*.

The Third and Last way of setting God before us, is as an *Observer*; when we consider him as a Being Essentially present in all Places, and with all Creatures, who all live, move and have their Being in him, and beyond all Places and Creatures too, in those infinite Spaces where he can erect new Worlds, but where as yet there is nothing besides himself. I shall not here enter into a nice Disquisition concerning the *Omnipresence* of God, being willing rather to Suppose than Dispute it. But however, lest this way of setting God before us, should be thought Imaginary and Precarious, give me leave by the way, only to remark, that 'tis every whit as reasonable to think the Essence of God to be *every where*, as to be *always*, and that *Immensity* is as rational as *Eternity*: That Great and Stupendous

pendous Being, who is allowed to reach through all *Times*, may as well be allowed to reach through all *Places*; nay much rather, since it seems to be a less Perfection to be every where, than to be always. For to be always in Duration, is such an intrinsic Denomination, as springs from the greatest of all God's natural Perfections; for it arises from the necessity of his Existence, whereby he cannot but be, which is the highest degree of Being, as being directly opposite to not Being, and consequently of Perfection. But now to be every where, seems rather an extrinsic Denomination relating to somewhat *without*, and such as is not directly contrary to not Being, but only to limited Being. And if we ascribe the Greater to God, why should there be any Controversie about the Less? Taking therefore the Supposition for granted, we may well consider God as a Being every where Essentially present, and consequently as an All-seeing and All-knowing Being, to whom all Hearts are open, and all Desires known, and from whom no Secrets are hid; and not only as an idle Observer, but as one that takes such strict Notice and Cognizance of what he sees and knows, as to treasure and seal it up against the Day of Retribution, and to Punish or Reward us accordingly.

These I take to be the several ways of setting

ting God before us, so as to reap any Spiritual advantage from it : I come now in the Second place to represent the many and great advantages arising from each, and what an excellent Art and Spiritual Expedient it is for Holy Living, thus to set God always before us ; and truly the advantages are very great ; for as the Habitual Knowledge of God, and the Belief of his Existence, are the first and general Foundations of all Religion, according to that of the Apostle, *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him, Heb. 11. 6.* So the actual Consideration of him under these Capacities, is highly conducive to the Promotion and Accomplishment of all Holiness and Vertue.

For First, to begin with those advantages that naturally spring from the Consideration of God as the *Supream Good*, what can be more excellent than the Love of God ? 'Tis the highest Elevation of a Creature, and withal the most pregnant and comprehensive of all the Virtuous Dispositions he is capable of : 'Tis like the Flower or Blossom of a Plant, which contains all in it, and therefore our Saviour calls it the *First and the Great Commandment, Matt. 22. 38.* But now what more effectual means can there be next to the Grace of him who is Essential Love, and who, as the Apostle tells us, *sheds*  
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*the Love of God abroad in our Hearts, Rom.*

5. 5. I say, what more effectual means can there be to kindle, increase, and keep alive in us this Heavenly and Divine Fire, than to set God always before us as the *Supream Good*? Can a Man consider any thing barely as *Good*, and not love it, when love it self is nothing else but an Inclination of the Soul to Good; he may indeed not proceed to chuse it, because it may come into competition with a greater, which when it does, not the good, but the absence of it is to be Chosen, as being the lesser Evil; but yet notwithstanding, he must still love it with a Natural Love, as long as he considers it as in any degree good. Much less then can a Man refuse to love God, when he considers him not only as Good, but as the *Supream Good*. For here, besides that natural inclination which necessarily follows upon the appearance of Good as Good, there is this peculiar to be considered, that there is no room for Competition with a greater Good, and accordingly that Natural Love and Inclination which is due to God as Good, must needs pass into act and effectual Choice, upon the consideration of his being the *Supream Good*. The last degree of Love or Inclination must needs be actual and effectual, when it has nothing to out-weigh it, as the least Weight weighs down the Scale where there  
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is no contrary weight to counterballance and over rule it. He therefore that sets God always before him as the supream Good, and never thinks of him but under that Notion, must necessarily and effectually love him, as he that looks upon Sin as the greatest of all Evils, must necessarily and effectually hate it : For the Beauties of God are infinitely Charming and Attractive in themselves, and there wants nothing but our serious and due Attention to make them become so to us ; and the more we apply our Attention to them, the more we shall be in love with them. What is it that makes the *Seraphims* burn and flame above the rest of the Angelical Orders, but because they see more of the First and Supream Beauty ? Now as Love depends upon *Vision* in the other Life, so does it upon *Contemplation* in this, and consequently, he that considers the infinite Perfection of God most, must necessarily love him most. Contemplation is the most proper and genuine incentive of Love wherever the Object is truly deserving of it, as discovering to us the reasons why it ought to be loved : I say, where the Object is truly deserving of our Love ; for otherwise it will serve only to discover its Vanity, and so lessen its amiableness ; which is the reason that the best way to cure our Love to the World, is thoroughly to consider it. But in  
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case the Object be a true and real Good, and such as will abide the Test of Meditation, and endure to be weighed and handled on both sides, the proper way to beget and increase our Love toward such an Object as this, is studiously to Contemplate it ; and then the Light that is in our Understandings, will beget a warmth in our Wills and Affections. Experience as well as Reason may inform us, that the way to love any thing that is truly good, and will bear a near inspection, is to look much upon it, and consider it thoroughly, since even the most indifferent Objects by long stay and dwelling upon them, do by degrees so gain upon our Affections, that we may come at last to have a kind of a fancy and a kindness for them ; and many have gazed and stared upon an ordinary Face so long, till they have entertained a more than ordinary Passion. And if the meanest Beauty of the Creature by frequent and familiar interviews, becomes at length so Lovely and Charming, how much more shall the continual Meditation upon the Beauty of the Creator, kindle in us a Love towards him, and a Delight in him ! The longer certainly we sit thus under his Shadow, the more we shall delight to do so, and his Fruit will be the more sweet to our Taste, *Cant. 2. 3.* And if the *general* Consideration of God has such influence upon  
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our Love of him, how much stronger will that Influence be, when we set him before us under the Notion and Capacity of the Supreme Good ! And therefore when the Psalmist in a deep Contemplation of the Beauties of Christ, had proceeded so far as to conclude him fairer than the Children of Men ; as if wounded to the Heart with the Rays of his Divine Beauty, he presently adds, *Thy Arrows are very sharp, Psal. 45.*

They are indeed Lord Jesus, they are very Sharp and Keen, like the Sword that proceeds out of thy Mouth ; and how is it that we can resist the Power of thy Sovereign Beauty ! Thou woundest the *Seraphim* and *Cherubim*, and all the Orders of Angels with the Arrows of thy Love, and they burn at the Rays of thy Divine Light and Glory : Whom have *they* in Heaven but thee, and what is there on Earth that they desire in comparison of thee ? But we who are every day vanquished and led in triumph by Meaner Beauties, stand yet proof against thy Diviner Charms, and feel none of the impressions of thy Love. But 'tis our Blindness that is our Defence, and our inattention is the Shield that repels thy Darts : We do not Contemplate thee as thy Angels do, nor as we our selves do the Beauties of this Sensible World. O do thou then open and fix our Eyes upon thee, and they will soon  
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receive in thy Divine Rays ; engage but our Minds to *Contemplate* thee, and then we shall not chuse but *Love thee*.

Nor is this the only advantage of setting God before us as the Supream Good ; for as this is a consideration of excellent use to excite and quicken in us the Love of God, so does it also Secondly, contribute both to convince us of the World's Vanity, and to support us under that Conviction. He that is *not* sensible of the vanity of Created Good, had need present God to his Thoughts as the Supream Good, that he may have a right sense and apprehension of it ; and he that *is*, had need Meditate upon God under the same Notion, that he may have wherewithal to support his Mind under such a Conviction ; and this way of setting God before us, is a very effectual means to do both. The Vanity of the Creature never appears with that advantage of clearness and conviction, as when we Contemplate the Fullness and Excellency of the Creator, which presently weakens and puts out all the Luster of the World, as the Sun does that of a Candle, meerly by *out-shining* it. And when a Man by the help of this Contemplation is arrived to this sense and conviction, the same will also serve to support him under it. 'Tis supposed here, that the Man will then stand in great need of some Support or other, and that

that very justly ; for the Soul of Man being not her own End and Good, must needs rely on something *without* for her Happiness, and as long as she thinks that this may be found among the Creatures, she is pretty well satisfied and at ease. But no sooner is she awakened out of this pleasing Dream, into a Conviction of the World's Vanity, but she has lost her hold, has nothing to enjoy, nothing to rest upon ; and what a barren disconsolate condition must she be then in, unless she has some other Refuge to retreat to for her Support ? And what other Support *can* there or *need* there be, but the Consideration of the Divine Fullness and Greatness, which will make abundant Supply for all the Deficiency that is in the Creature, were it infinitely more vain than it is, and so *relieve* that Conviction which it has occasioned.

But Thirdly, This is also a general Remedy against all other Trouble and Sadness, as well as against that which arises from the Conviction of the World's Vanity ; the best Consolation of an Afflicted Mind, is to think upon God ; this will cheer and refresh the Soul, when Rational Discourses and Wise Sentences are applied in vain ; for if your Sorrow proceed from Fear, what more proper relief than to Meditate upon the Power of God, who is able to deliver us from the  
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worst of Evils ? If from Love or Desire, what better allay can be found than to Contemplate the Perfection of God, who is able to satisfy our most Craving Appetites ? If from Distrust or Despair, what can we do better than Meditate upon the Goodness and Faithfulness of God, who loves whatever he has made, knows our frame, and considers that we are but Dust ? If from the consideration of the ill state of Mankind, either as to Sin or Misery, how can we satisfy ourselves better than by Meditating upon the excellent Order and Conduct of the Providence of God, who Governs the World in a way becoming his Infinite Perfections, and disposes all things sweetly ? And so in the like manner in all other instances, whatever be the occasion of our Trouble and Sadness, no Consolation like Meditating upon God, and setting him before us : It is so if we think upon him at *large*, but more especially if we Contemplate him as the *Supream Good*. This is a more immediate and direct remedy against all Sorrow ; for Good is directly contrary to Evil, and the sense of Good will counterpoise the sense of Evil, if it be an equal Good ; and if it be a greater, it will overcome and swallow it up, nay and leave some degrees of pure Happiness behind, so that the Man shall rather *enjoy* than *suffer*. But now 'tis impossible for a Man to represent



sent God to his Thoughts as the Supream Good, as his proper End and Happiness, without a strong Sense of his Goodness and Perfection ; he must in a great measure *taste* and *feel* that Good which he Contemplates, and even this Obscure Vision of God is in some degree *Beatifick*. And what grief or sadness of Mind then is there which this strong Sense and Taste of God will not overcome, and which will not be quite dissolved, swallowed up and lost in the Contemplation of the Supream good ? Upon which Considerations, well might the Psalmist say, *Psal.* 77. 3. *When I am in Heaviness, I will think upon God.* He might have thought upon his Royal Greatness, and the Pomp and Magnificence of his Court, or upon his Riches, or upon his Friends, or upon his Victories and Triumphs ; or if none of those would do, he might have taken his Harp into his Hand, and have driven away the Evil Spirit of Melancholy by Musick from himself, as he did before from *Saul* : But he had a better expedient than all this, *When I am in Heaviness I will think upon God.*

Nor is this all ; for should we not also upon the strength of this Consideration, despise and disrelish all those vain Pleasures which betray us into Sin ? Should we not be above the Temptations of either Honour, Pleasure or Profit ? Should we not be secure



from that Foolish Exchange which those that pass for the Wisest among us frequently make, I mean that of gaining the World, and losing one's own Soul? Lastly, should we not endeavour by all Means possible to qualify our selves for the blessed Enjoyment of this Supreme Good, and in order to that, to cleanse our selves from all Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit, and to Purifie our selves as he is Pure? Yes, we should; the Love of God would easily constrain us to all this, and the serious application of our Minds to the Infinity of the Divine Perfection, would as easily constrain us to the Love of God.

And so much for the advantages of setting God always before us as the *Supream Good*; let us now consider in the Second Place how we may be advantaged by setting him before us as a *Pattern*. We all know and feel the great force and power of *Example*, and how naturally disposed Men are to Imitation, and that we are much the better or the worse for those with whom we Converse: And there is this great difference between *Example* and a *Rule*, that a Rule only directs, but Example does also incline; a Rule instructs the Judgment, but Example moves and reconciles the Affections; the former shews us the right Point to which we are to steer, but the latter supplies us also with Wind and Sail. And there is no reason

son to doubt, but that the Example of God would be as prevailing with us, as any other, and much more, (as being of infinitely greater Authority,) if we did but equally propose him to our imitation, and set him before us as a Pattern. Can then a Man consider the Universal *Sanctity* of the Divine Nature, and not find himself strongly inclined to work over anew the defaced Image of his Creator, and to be Holy as he is Holy? St. *John* assigns this for a Reason why we shall be like God hereafter, because we shall see him as he is; *We shall be like him*, says he, *for we shall see him as he is*. And if the clear and open Vision of God will so far assimilate us, as to make us perfectly conformable to him, certainly the Contemplation of his Moral Perfections, though through a Glass darkly, must needs inspire us with Desires and Endeavours to be like him. Is it then possible for a Man seriously and constantly to contemplate the Infinite Love, Bounty and Goodness of God, and either be ungrateful to *him*, or uncharitable to his Neighbour, to be selfish and strait-laced, niggardly and covetous, reserved and uncommunicative? Much less can he be Envious and Spiteful, Cruel and Unmerciful, and delight in Barbarity and doing Mischief; it would be a Miracle if he should. The Psalmist thought it so, and therefore says he,

*Psalm 52. 1. Why Boastest thou thy self thou Tyrant, that thou canst do Mischief, whereas the Goodness of God endureth yet daily ?* He thought it strange that any Man should value himself for being able to do Mischief, when God thought it his Glory to do Good : He might have reprov'd his Folly and Wickedness from the very nature of the thing, by laying open the great unreasonableness of it, but he chose rather to convince him of the strangeness and absurdity of such a temper, from the Consideration of the *Divine Goodness*.

Which before I leave, I shall mention one more very excellent advantage which it has in the Practice of Religion, in that it is apt to remove from us all servile fear, and to inspirit us with a generous and ingenuous Principle of serving God. For all Slavish and Superstitious Fears of God proceed from a wrong Notion of him ; we Fear him, and are Jealous of him, because we misapprehend him ; and we misapprehend him, because we do not sufficiently contemplate him. The way therefore to be afraid of him less, is to be more Conversant, and better acquainted with him. When the Disciples saw Jesus walking upon the Sea, and knew not who it was, they were scared with the Appearance ; and therefore our Lord to take off their Fear, only made himself better known

known to them. *It is I*, says he, *be not afraid*. 'Twas enough to dismiss their Fears to let them know who he was. Nor need we at any time any other Remedy against servile Apprehensions, and disingenuous Fears of God, than barely to contemplate the Goodness and Benignity of his Nature, expressed in those two Emphatical Descriptions given of him in Scripture, *God is Love*, and *God is Light*.

And thus 'twere easie to give instances throughout all the other Moral Perfections of God ; but I shall insist only upon one more, as being more particularly fit and useful to be considered in the Age we now live in. Can then a Man duly contemplate the *Truth* and *Sincerity* of God, how candid, open and ingenuous he is in his dealings with the Sons of Men, and how far removed from all Tricks, Juggles and Deceits, and that he can no more deceive, than he can be deceived ? Can a Man I say consider this, consider it well, and be a *Hypocrite* ? And that not only in an instance or two, but in a long series of Action ; not only for a few Hours or Days, but for a course of several Years ; not only in the common concerns of Life, but in the most sacred of all things, and where we owe the greatest Plainness and Sincerity both to God and Man, *Religion* ? Is Charity it self able to believe that such a



Myſterious Intricate Sinner as this, has made the Sincerity and Truth of God any part of his Meditations ? No, I fear if the truth were known, ſuch a one would be too much concerned in that Charge, wherewith the Pſalmiſt taxes the Proud Man, that *God is not in all his Thoughts*, *Pſal. 10.* that he does not think of him at all, or elſe that he has a wrong Notion of him, and takes him to be altogether ſuch a one as himſelf : But let ſuch a one know, that God will reprove him, and ſet before him the things which he has done ; for God does not only give us a Pattern of Truth and Sincerity, but does alſo ſtrictly obſerve whether we follow it or no : Which leads me to conſider in the laſt place, the advantage of ſetting God always before us as an *Obſerver*.

'Tis moſt certain whether we will conſider it or no, that God is every where Eſſentially and Subſtancially Preſent, and that as there is no Place that *includes* him, ſo there is none that *excludes* him ; a notion of God ſo very natural, that even the *Jews*, as Groſs and Unmetaphyſical as they were, could not but embrace it. Which was the occaſion of that Cuſtom of theirs in their Sacrifices, (taken notice of by Dr. *Outram* out of *Maimonides*.) of waving the Victim towards the Six Parts of the World, upwards and down-

downwards, East, West, North and South, whereby to exprefs the Consecration of the Sacrifice to God as every where Present, and poffeffing all Places.

'Tis alfo moft certain, whether we will confider it or no, that God fees and knows all things, and that (as the Author to the *Hebrews* expreffes it, *Heb. 4. 13.*) there is no Creature that is not manifelt in his Sight, and that all things are naked and open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do. This we have moft magnificently defcribed by the Pfalmift in the 139 Pfalm, *O Lord thou haft fearched me out, and known me ; thou knoweft my down fitting and mine up-rifing, thou underftandeft my Thoughts long before. Thou art about my Path, and about my Bed, and fpieft all my ways : For lo there is not a word in my Tongue, but thou O Lord knoweft altogether. And again, whither fhall I go then from thy Spirit, or whither fhall I go then from thy Prefence ? If I climb up into Heaven, thou art there, if I go down to Hell thou art there alfo. If I take the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermoft parts of the Sea, even there alfo fhall thy Hand lead me, and thy right Hand fhall hold me. If I fay peradventure the Darknefs fhall cover me, then fhall my Night be turned into Day. Yea, the Darknefs is no Darknefs with thee, but the*

*Night is as clear as the Day, the Darknefs and Light to thee are both alike.*

Why now this we all know, and if formally put to the Question, fhall be ready to confefs it ; for I am willing to fuppofe, that there are fcarce any that are either Ignorant, or Impudent enough to fay with the Atheiftical Perfon in *Job*, *How does God know, can he judge through the dark Cloud ? Thick Clouds are a Covering to him that he fees not, and he walketh in the Circuit of Heaven, Job 22. 13.* No, we know the contrary well enough, that God is prefent every where, and fees and knows every thing, but the Mifery of it is, we don't confider it ; and 'tis for want of actually thinking upon what we habitually know that the World is ruined. 'Tis this that makes fo great a difference between the Behaviour and Converfation of one Man and another. All believe Omniprefence and Omnifcience to be Perfections belonging to the Infinitenefs of the Divine Effence ; but one maintains actual Thoughts and Recollections of this, and another does not ; one has it lying dormant in him, as a general Notion or Theory, which he can talk and difcourfe of now and then when occafion is offered, and the other has it always actually prefent before him in its full Light and Conviction. Whence it comes to pafs. that though both agree in the general belief  
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of the Article, yet because one attends to it, and the other does not, the way of their Conversation is altogether different, and one lives as an *Angel*, and the other as a *Devil*.

For indeed were this one Consideration sufficiently heeded and attended to, it were enough of it self to regulate the conduct of Mens Actions, and to reduce the whole World into a truer order and exactness of Living. There are indeed many excellent Methods of obtaining Vertuous and Religious Dispositions of Mind, and of Improvement in them, but none that I can think of so advantageous as this : That which comes nearest to it, is the *Meditation of Death* ; but indeed this comes too near to be reckoned as another, it being rather a further instance and improvement of the same. For the Meditation of Death is only so far influential upon our Lives, as 'tis a nearer and stricter way of considering the *Divine Presence*, before which we shall be more immediately presented by Death. So that the Meditation of Death, (as far as it has any influence upon good Living,) is comprehended under the Consideration of the Divine Presence, as a Particular under a General ; as indeed whatever is good in any other method of Holy Living, is after a manner Comprehended in this, which of all others is the most Comprehensive and Compendious.



ous. Which was the ground of that Admonition of God to *Abraham*, *I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou Perfect* : *Gen. 17.* Where he supposes such a Connexion between the constant Attention to the Divine Presence and Perfection, that to attain the latter, a Man need only practice the former. God in giving *Abraham* this Direction for a Holy and a Perfect Life, gave him *all* ; for this single Exercise of Meditating upon the Presence of God, will either incline a Man both to the Desire and to the Practice of all other Spiritual methods and helps of Holy Living ; or else it will supply the room of them. So that if a Man who desires to advance in Spiritual Life, should happen to forget any of the other methods of the Spirit, let him only remember this one, and duly use and exercise it, and he shall either by this bring the rest to his Mind, or find no necessity of so doing. This therefore may well be reckoned as the Head and Chief of all Spiritual Exercises ; for indeed this one Exercise draws such a train of advantages after it, as by the assistance of Divine Grace will be sufficient to perfect the Man of God, and compleat the Christian.

But to be a little more distinct, the advantageousness of this Practice may appear in a double respect.

First,

First, As it is a general Counter-charm against all Sin.

Secondly, As it is a general Incitement to all that is good.

First, *It is a general Counter-charm against all Sin*; for as Sin in its formality is an Aversion from God, so the cause of all Sin does at last resolve into Forgetfulness of him, and a Non-consideration of his Presence and Inspection: There is an Aversion from him in our Understandings, before there is any in our Wills, and the latter is the effect of the former. The Scripture represents *Cain* as *going out from the Presence of God*, Gen. 4. 16. after he had sinned; but 'tis as true also that he went out *before*; for had he not first cast off the thoughts of God's Presence, 'tis impossible that he should have sinned. And the same may truly be said of all other Sinners, they first depart from God in their Thoughts, and then in their Actions: First forget *his Presence*, and then their *own Duty*: For can we conceive any Man so stupid and hardy as to commit Sin, when at the same time he actually reflects upon a Being of Infinite Holiness, Power and Justice, looking upon him, and upon what he does? Could we suppose God to appear visibly to us when we were in Private, this we must needs grant would strike us with Serious and Reverent Apprehensions, and that we should  
*stand*

*stand in awe, and not Sin*, though in the very heat and full Career of a Temptation. And why should not *God's seeing us*, have the same Influence upon us, as *Our seeing God*? Without question it would, and a great deal more, if we had but the same lively sense of it, and were equally awake and attentive to it; for we see that infinitely less than this will restrain us from Sin; the Eye of the World, nay of one single Person, though an Inferior, though a Slave, though a Fool, though a Child: Nay, even the very Eye of the *Sun*, which very often puts the Sinner out of Countenance, and makes him defer his Folly till the Shades of Night. And shall not the Presence of the Great God be as prevalent with us as any of these, especially considering that no Creature can be so inwardly present with us as the Creator is, and that no Observation is of such Importance and Consequence as his? Shall not then his Presence and Inspection be as a Preservative against Sin, as the Presence of a Man? Without doubt it would, and infinitely more, did we but equally consider it; it would then secure us not only from *Sin*, but even from *Temptation* too, and keep us out of *Danger* as well as in *Innocence*. For how can he be tempted to Sin, who dwells always in the Presence of his Creator and Judge? Why are the Angels and the Souls  
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of Just Men made Perfect, secure from the danger of Sinning, but only because they are always in the open Presence of God, and dwell in the Light of his Countenance ? This is their great Preservative *above*, and the same if well attended to, would be a Preservative to us *below*. The Perseverance of the Angels in Heaven is owing to their always beholding the Presence of God there ; and if we could do the same here in proportion, that is, if our *Contemplation* were but as actual, steady, and uninterrupted as their *Vision*, we should be as Confirmed and Established as they. In short, notwithstanding the great Corruption of our Nature, and our Proneness to Evil, we need no other Guard, either against Sin, or against Temptation, than these Three Words well considered, *God is Present*.

But there is One particular Sin to which this Consideration is utterly irreconcilable, and against which it is a peculiar Antidote, and that is the Sin of *Hypocrisy* ; this is a Sin which of all others proceeds most upon the Supposition of God's not being privy to our Thoughts and Intentions, and his not having a thorough Comprehensive Knowledge of all things : As the Fool says in his Heart there is no God, so the Hypocrite says in his Heart, that if there be, yet he is no Observer, as being neither Omnipresent, nor  
Omni-



Omniscient : Which Attributes of God whoever seriously Contemplates, must needs have his Antidote against this Vice. For to what purpose should a Man play the *Hypocrite* before him, who can discern the Fraud and Rottenness of the Proud Pharisee under his *broad Phylactery*, and the ravenous Covetousness of the Precise Sectary under his *long Prayer* ? No, as the Hypocrite takes care to avoid open Immoralities, because they are visible to the Eye of the *World* ; so, had he a due Sense of the Divine Presence and Observation, he would be every whit as careful to be without all inward Impurities, because they are visible to the Eye of God. But,

Secondly, *This Practice is also a general Incitement to all that is good* : As the Supposition of God's Omnipresence and Omniscience is the Foundation of all Religion ; (for to what purpose should we make Religious Addresses to a Being that is either afar off, or unconscious of our Behaviour towards him,) so the constant and actual Impression of it, would greatly promote the Practice of all Religion, *Walk before me, and be thou Perfect* : How can he be Perfect that does not walk with and before God, and how can he be otherwise that does ? The actual Thoughts of the presence of God is the very Life and Spirit of all Religion, without which,

which, we should be quickly weary of Well-doing, and with which, we shall be so far from flagging in our Duty, that we shall be always endeavouring to do better and better, that so we may the more approve our Selves and our Actions to our All-present and All-seeing Judge. This was the Principle into which *David* resolved all the Perfection and Integrity of his Obedience, that he acted as in the Sight and Presence of his Judge. *I have kept thy Commandments and Testimonies, for all my Ways are before thee, Psalm 119.* And no doubt if we acted by the same Principle, we should live with the same exactness; if we lived under a constant sense of the Presence of God as he did, we should also with him have respect to all his Commandments. When the Glorious Presence of God appeared to the *Israelites* upon *Mount Sinai*, we find that they were so sensibly affected with that terrible Sight, as to take up earnest Resolutions of Obedience: for *all the People answered Moses, reporting the Words of God to them with one Voice, and said, All the Words which the Lord hath said will we do.* And as long as this Presence of God continued, we don't find but that they were very Orderly and Obedient, and contained themselves within those Boundaries which *Moses* by Divine Order had set about the Mount: And there is no question to be made,

made, but that if they could still have maintained a fresh and lively Idea of this great Presence in their Minds, they would also have retained the same obedient Temper of Spirit, and would have contained themselves within all *other* Bounds of God's setting, as well as those of *Mount Sinai*; their Heart would have been whole with him, and they would have continued stedfast in his Covenant. We may therefore, and without Censure conclude, that those who take liberty to break through the Bounds which God has set, by transgressing those excellent Laws which he has given for the good Order and happy Being of Mankind, are not duly sensible of the Divine Presence and Observation: They may know it indeed Habitually as a meer Point of Speculation, but they do not actually weigh and consider it, and have reason to say in the Words of the Patriarch when awakened from Sleep, *Surely God was in this Place, and I knew it not, Gen. 28.*

And now since the Spiritual Advantages of setting God always before us are so great and so many, I think I need use no other Perswasive to recommend this excellent Expedient of Holy Living to our constant Practice: In all other things we love the most Compendious Methods, and to make use of such Means as lead most directly and by  
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the shortest Line to the End we aim at. And why should we not follow the same Method in the Practice of a Religious Life, the difficulty and consequence of which is enough to engage us to seek out for the best and most forwarding Assistances? Now this certainly of all others will deserve that Character, being the most general Instrument of Perfection, and consequently the most Compendious way to it. Let us then be persuaded to make use of it, by setting God always before us, and having him always in our Thoughts, especially under this Threefold Consideration, as the *Supream Good*, as a *Pattern*, and as an *Observer*; so shall we have a perpetual encouragement to do well, and a sufficient Counterpoise against all Temptations. And God grant we may so set him always before us here, that we may not be afraid to appear before him hereafter. *Amen.*

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A Discourse concerning the doing God's Will on Earth, as it is in Heaven.

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Mat. 6. 10. *Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven.*

SO our Blessed Lord bids us to Pray, who came to be the Promoter of *Holiness*, as well as to be the Author of our *Faith*, and to Reform the World as well as to Redeem it. Now as 'tis the Perfection of the Natural World to be Conformable to the *Understanding* of God, those Immutable Ideal Representations which are in the Divine Mind, so is it the Perfection of the Moral World to be Conformable to his *Will*; and in both these, the Second Person of the Sacred Trinity, the *Eternal World*, St. John tells us, that *all things were made by him*, or according to him, *Si avrè*, and without him was not any thing made that was made. And St. Paul, 1 Col. 16. 17. that by him were all things Created that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth; and that

that *by him all things consist.* Again 'tis said, *Heb. 1. 2, 10. by whom also he made the Worlds.* And again, *Thou Lord in the beginning hast laid the Foundation of the Earth, and the Heavens are the Works of thy Hands.*

Then as to the perfecting the frame of the *Moral World*, as 'twas his Meat and Drink to do the Will of his Father himself, so was it his Principal Business, and the Main of his Undertaking, to repair the Ruins of Morality, to enlarge the Bounds of his Fathers Kingdom, to make others conformable to the Divine Will, and Partakers of the Divine Nature ; which in part has already taken effect, and of which (as we are told,) we are yet to expect a further Accomplishment under his Glorious Millennial Reign, when Righteousness shall flourish and be exalted, and the Will of God be done on Earth to a very near degree as it is in Heaven.

To this end serves the great Mystery of Goodness, that Grace of God which has appeared to the World, teaching us, *2 Tit. 11.* that denying Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, we should live Soberly, Righteously and Godlily in this present World ; the Covenant of Grace being so ordered and contrived, that our Duty is secured, as well as our Infirmary and Necessity relieved, and our Repentance is only made effectual by the satisfaction of Christ, not unnecessary.

To this End he gave us a new System of Christian Morals, which though no addition to the Eternal Law of Nature and right Reason, was yet a great Improvement of that of *Moses*. And he took care also to second his excellent Precepts, by as excellent an Example, that they might appear to be Practicable as well as Reasonable.

And here because Example has the greater Influence of the Two, he not only gave us an absolute one of his own, and exhorted us to the imitation of it, when he said, *Learn of me*, but also remits us to the excellent Example of the Angels, those ready Performers of God's Will, and winged Ministers of his Pleasure, in that he bids us Pray, *Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven*.

That God's Will is done in Heaven, is here supposed; we are therefore further concerned only to inquire,

1. Of what Will of God our Lord is to be here understood?
2. By whom it is done in Heaven?
3. After what manner it is there done?
4. How far we are concerned to imitate this great Pattern of Obedience?
5. How reasonable it is for us to do so?

And First by *Will*; here our Lord cannot be supposed to mean that which is a Faculty in the Divine Essence, or rather the very Essence it self; for how may we Pray that  
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that should be done, which Eternally and Necessarily is? Neither by Will here are we to understand the Act of Willing, for this can no more properly be said to be *done* than the other; but that Will, for the doing of which we here Pray, is the *Res Volita*, or the Object of the Divine Will: But then this is Two fold, either the Object of his Will Decreeing, or the Object of his Will Commanding; or to word it according to the ordinary distinction, the Will of his Decrees, or the Will of his Commands: And 'tis generally held that both these are to be here understood.

But I must confess it does not appear to me how the Will of God's Decrees can be at all here concerned, any further than as our Submission to it is a part of the Will of his Commands; for not to insist upon the necessary and uncontrollable accomplishment of God's Decrees, and that things necessary and certain are not so proper Objects of Prayer, I only observe that this Will of God is here desired to be done in Earth as it is in Heaven; which supposes it to be more perfectly performed in the one than in the other; the latter being proposed as a Pattern and Precedent to the former. But now, as God is in all Places equally Almighty, so are his Decrees in all Places alike performed in Earth as well as in Heaven, according to



that of the Psalmist, *Psal. 135. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in Heaven and in Earth, and in the Sea, and in all deep Places*; this therefore cannot be meant of the Will of God's Decrees, any further than as 'tis a part of the Will of his **Commands** that we should submit to them, and acquiesce in them. Neither indeed can this be directly and strictly intended, but only by way of *Proportion*, that as the whole Will of God, which is capable of being done in Heaven is there done; so all that is capable of being done on Earth, should in like manner be there done. But I say it cannot be directly intended, there being no **Afflictive Dispensations** of Providence incident to those who do God's Will in Heaven, and consequently no room for the Exercise of Patience and Submission; as will further appear by considering the Second Inquiry, namely, by whom it is that this Will of God is done in Heaven.

And this indeed is of no great Difficulty to resolve, since the nature of the Will does of it self point out to the Doers of it; for it being the Will of God's **Commands**, it can no more be done by God, than 'tis possible for God to obey himself. Nor can it be done by the **Celestial Bodies**; for however these in a large and improper sense are sometimes said to obey God, as when the Psalmist says,  
that

that the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-work ; and that Wind and Storm fulfil his Word, and the like : Yet being necessary Agents, they cannot yield any Moral and Acceptable Obedience ; much less in such an eminent and exemplary manner as to be a Pattern to us, which yet is here supposed. And yet they will be every whit as capable of this Obedience as we are, if we be not *free Agents* ; which by the way I leave to be considered by those who deny that Privilege to Human Nature. It remains therefore, that the Holy Angels are they that do this Will of God in Heaven ; none else are capable of doing it, and of these the Psalmist says expressly, that *they fulfil his Commandment, and hearken to the Voice of his Word, Psalm 103.*

Proceed we therefore to the next Inquiry, namely, after what manner this Will of God is done by the Holy Angels in Heaven ; that they do it after a very perfect and excellent manner, far exceeding the highest Measures of Mortality, is here implied, in that they are proposed and commended to us as Patterns, and might be further concluded from the Perfection of their Natures and Faculties, which we cannot but suppose to be very extraordinary, since the excellency of our future condition is summ'd

up in this short Description, that we shall be *like unto the Angels*, Luke 20. 36.

But waving this Consideration taken from the Powers and Faculties of Angels as somewhat too Nice and Metaphysical for a Practical Discourse, I shall chuse rather to represent the great Excellency wherewith they perform the Will of God from Two Collateral Considerations.

First, The Impediments they are free from.

Secondly, The positive Advantages they enjoy.

And First, as to the Impediments they are free from ; 'Tis the great disadvantage of all Human Spirits in this Station, as well as the Complaint of some, that they are united with Bodies that are not proportioned to the Native Excellency and Activity of their Natures ; for indeed the Soul has made an ill Match, Married very much beneath her self, and has met with a Clog instead of a Companion , one that is too weak to obey her Dictates and Motions, and too strong to be governed ; that cannot follow, and that will not be lead ; that sticks too close to her to be shaken off, and yet is too loose from her to be well managed : Such an untractable ill-suited Consort as this must needs be a stant incumbrance to the Soul, even in her Natural, but much more in her Moral and  
Spiri-

Spiritual Operations, because here the Comfort has contrary Inclinations ; so that the Soul is put to incounter not only with her ordinary weight, but with an Opposite Law, even the *Law* of the *Members* which wars against the Law of the Mind, and brings us into Captivity to the Law of Sin, *Rom. 7.23.*

Neither is this all, for we are not only cumbered with a weight of Flesh, and depressed by its low tendencies and propensions ; but our Body which at best is but in an ill disposition for the Operations of the Rational and Divine Life, is often discomposed and made worse by *Sickness*, and then the Soul is forced to sympathize and condole with her ill suited Companion, and either not to act at all, or to perform her Part upon an ill-tuned Instrument : And he that is blessed with the strongest and most tunable Constitution, and enjoys the most vigorous Health, has yet a great many necessities of Nature to serve, that will take up much of his Thoughts and much of his Time ; so that he can't chuse but be *troubled about many things*, things below the concernment of a Rational Being, and that, though he has chosen the *Better Part*, and is so well convinced of his true Interest, as to acknowledge only *one thing* to be *needful*.

Add to all this, that we breath in an infected Air, live in an ill World, where every Object



ject almost is a Temptation, and have a Devil to tempt and seduce us ; one who makes it his proper and profest business to cross the Ends of God, to disturb the Moral Harmony of the Universe, and to hinder the symphony and agreement of the Two Worlds, that so God's Will may not be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven ; And with these Disadvantages no wonder that it is not.

But now the Holy Angels have none of these impediments ; they have either no Bodies, or such as no way incommode or retard, but rather help and further their Faculties ; for they are in the full height and last perfection of their Natures, and consequently must not be supposed to have the least degree of any of their Natural Perfections detained or held back from exerting it self by any Clog or Impediment ; there being no reason imaginable why they should be invested with any degree of Power which must never be brought into Act, as it never must be if not at present, they being now supposed to be in the last Perfection of their Natures. They must be therefore conceived in this respect, to act like *necessary Agents* to the *full*, and to the *utmost* of their natural Strength, and to have nothing in them that is not put forth as far as possibly can be. And besides, the Scripture always speaks of them

them under the denomination of *Spirits*, without making mention of any Bodies belonging to them ; which must needs imply, that either they are all Pure Minds, (as the *Platonists* say of the highest Order,) or if they have Bodies, they are of so refined and clarified a Mould, so nigh to an Immaterial Substance, that *Spirit* might serve as a common word for both. They have therefore no weight or load upon their Faculties, nothing to dead or slacken the *Spring* of their Nature, no Concupiscence to darken their Understandings, or to pervert their Wills, no Indisposition, Languor or Weariness occasioned through crazy and sickly Vehicles, but are always Fresh, Vigorous and Bright, like the life and quickness of the Morning, and rejoyce like the Sun to run their Course. They have no Necessities to relieve or provide for, no impertinent Avocations to call them off from their noble Exercises, no ill Company to debauch them, no Devil to tempt and insnare them, and therefore must needs act with a full display of their Faculties, and be carried out unceasingly and intirely toward the Supreme Good, with their whole bent and energy, as a Stone would tend toward the Center through an *unresisting* Medium.

But this will further appear by considering Secondly the positive advantages which they enjoy:

enjoy : Their great advantage is, that they have a constant and clear Vision of the Essence of the great God. Now I consider that the Essence of God is the very Essence of Goodness, *יְהוָה הוּא הַטוֹב*, as the Divine Philosopher fitly calls him ; whereupon I conceive that an Angel seeing God after this Essential manner, must have the same Habitude and Disposition to him, as one that does not thus see God has to the common Nature of Good. But now 'tis impossible that a Man should either will or act any thing without attending to good in common, and without proposing that as his aim : And accordingly 'tis as impossible that the Blessed Angels should will or act any thing without attending to God, and making him their End as long as they have this Essential Vision of him ; and of this they are never deprived, for our Lord says of them, that they always behold the Face of his Father which is in Heaven, *Mat. 18. 10.* This he speaks of the *Missionary* Angels that have the Charge and Office of Guardians here upon Earth, that even *they* notwithstanding their Employment here, have a consistent view of the Divine Essence, and are never interrupted in their Beatifick Vision ; much more then is this true of the *Stationary* Angels that wait upon the Throne of God, the *Residentaries* of Heaven. Whence it further follows,

follows, that 'tis impossible they should ever *Sin*, or do any thing contrary to the Divine Nature or Will. For the Essence of God being supposed to be the same to them that good in general is to us, the Vision of it must needs wholly ingage and constantly retain all their Powers and Faculties ; (for we can never will any thing out of the Sphere of Good in general,) communicate a kind of Deiform Habit to their Natures, and render them in all things exactly conformable to the Divine Will. And accordingly the Apostle derives our future likeness and conformity to God from our Vision of him ; *We shall be like him*, says he, *for we shall see him as he is*, 1 John 3. 2.

This shall be our Felicity hereafter ; but it is the Priviledge of the Blessed Angels to enjoy it now, and therefore by the strength of the same Argument it must be supposed that they are as like God as the clearest Vision of him can make them ; that is, as like him as finite can be like infinite, as a Creature can be like its Creator. That they are exactly conformable to the Perfections of that Adorable Excellence which they behold, that they love what he loves, and hate what he hates, and that in all things they perform his Will and Pleasure in a more excellent manner than such imperfect *Thinkers* as we are, can either conceive or describe.

Thus



Thus in general ; but now for a more particular account of the excellent manner of their Doing the Will of God in Heaven, we are to consider.

First, That they do it with full *Readiness* and *Alacrity* : 'Tis the necessary as well as unhappy Appendage of our Mortal frame, even in its best condition, to act with a mix'd Consent and a divided Choice : Sin indeed we sometimes do with a full and thorough Consent, without any renitencies to the contrary side ; but our resolutions to Good are mixt and imperfect ; for the most part we do not go so far, but 'tis our highest Atchievement to conquer and prevail against the tendencies of the Animal part, not to be without them. And though after some uncertain Vibrations, the Scale does at length weigh down for Duty and Obedience, yet still there is some weight in the other Balance, and the Motion though Victorious, yet is not intire and unresisted. But now the Holy Angels being free from the Impediments of a contrary Principle, perform the Will of God with a full, intire and perfect Consent ; they have no Demurs, or Disputings, no Reluctancies or Aversions, but at the first intimation approve and execute the Will of God with all the readiness and alacrity of an intire, pure and undivided Will. And accordingly in the Prophet *Isaiab's* Vision

sion of God in his Glory, the Seraphim appeared with Six Wings, *I/a. 6. 2. With twain he covered his Face, (the Text says) with twain he covered his Feet, and with twain he did fly.* But to the Prophet *Ezekiel*, *Ezek. 10.* the Vision was enlarged, for to him the Cherubims were represented with Wings and Wheels, both of them being very significant and lively Symbols of that eminent Alacrity and Agility wherewith the Holy Angels perform the Will of God.

The *Jews* indeed have a Proverb, *That the Angel of Justice flies but with one Wing*; but hereby I conceive they intend only the slowness of God in issuing out Commissions of Vengeance, not that of the Angels in putting them in Execution: For they see the Reason of the Command as well as the Letter of it; or if not, yet the clear Vision they have of the Divine Essence and Perfections, will not suffer them to doubt of the Equity and Reasonableness of all his Injunctions, as being well assured that nothing but what is highly Reasonable can be the result of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness: So that they are as well satisfied with the Decrees of Vengeance, as with the milder Emanations of his Love, and perform them both with equal Chearfulness. Thus we see the Angel who was Commissioned to keep laps'd Man out of Paradise with his Flaming Sword, betook himself

himself as readily to the ungrateful Office, as he that was to carry the welcome Tidings of Man's Redemption to the Shepherds, and to sing Glory to God on high, on Earth Peace and Good Will towards Men. And I question not but that those Sons of God which shouted for Joy at the laying the Foundations of this great Fabrick, will hereafter upon the Signal given, be full as ready to assist to its Destruction and Fiery Dissolution. But we are upon the same Grounds to consider,

Secondly, That their Obedience is *Uniform* and *Universal* as well as ready and chearful, and that they have an equal respect to all the Commands of God. Upon the same Principle that they are Ready and Chearful, they are also Uniform and Universal in their Obedience; for the reason why they Obey chearfully, is either because they are Convinced of the particular Equity and Reasonableness of the Law, or because they are convinced of the unerring Wisdom of the Law-giver, whom they know they may safely rely upon by an *implicit* Confidence, though they should not be able to account in particular for the Reason of what he Commands. And the same will be a sufficient satisfaction why they should obey him Universally, since every Precept either carries its own Evidence and Reason with it, or what

what is as good, an Inducement to Obedience, the undeceivable Reason of him that gives it. This is the Principle of *Believing* all that God *Reveals*, Mysteries as well as intelligible Articles, and the same is the Principle of Obeying all that God *Commands*. And wherever there is a clear Conviction of this, there *Obedience* must needs be as Universal as *Faith*, as having the same Grounds and Inducements : And there being no reason to question but that there is the highest Conviction of this in the Minds of Angels, we may proceed to consider,

Thirdly, With what *Constancy* they perform the Divine Will : They obey with Constancy, not only as 'tis opposed to final Cessation, but as 'tis opposed to the least Interruption. The highest Perseverance we can pretend to in this Region of Inconstancy, is not to fall off totally or finally ; nor are we sure of so much as that. But to maintain a steady Course of Obedience without the least Interruption, is beyond the measures of Flesh and Blood. But now the Holy Angels are not only secure from either total or final Apostacy, but even from the least abatements or interruptions of Duty ; for the Excellence which they Contemplate is always the same, and so also is the manner of their Contemplating it. They Contemplate the Face of God as the Philosopher says of  
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the Supream Intelligencies, *'Αει καὶ ὁμοῦτως* *always and alike*, and consequently cannot but love and adore him with a constant and uninterrupted Flame of Devotion, the Glorious Essence of God being the same to them that the common Nature of Good is to us, as was observed before : To which there is this further Advantage to be added, that their Understandings are never under an *Eclipse*, no not so much as in part ; but as they always receive equal Illumination from God, so do they shine upon their Wills with an equal Light ; and consequently they must needs stand always equally affected and disposed to what is good, as appearing to them always in a Light equally advantageous. For the variety and changeableness of our Wills proceed from the variety of our Judgments ; and were our Thoughts and Apprehensions of things always uniform, our Actions would be so too ; for we always act as for that instant we think. This therefore being the happy condition of Angels, to have the Eye of their Understanding always equally awake, and in full Illumination, there must needs be also a constant Regularity in their Wills. The short is, as long as they Contemplate the Divine Essence, they cannot divert aside to any thing irregular, because of the Superlative Excellence of the Divine Good, which fills and wholly engages the Faculties ;

Faculties ; and for the same reason they cannot chuse but for ever to Contemplate. And herein I suppose must be placed that happy *Necessity* the Holy Angels are under, of doing the Will of God, and of persevering in it to all Eternity ; and that this is that which we mean, when we say they are *Confirmed* in good.

But leaving these Flaming Excellencies a while to their Happy and Noble Employments, before we go further, let us see how these Speculations may be improved to the benefit of our Practice : And First, since God has made his Angels such excellent and accomplished Creatures, let us make the same use of it that the Psalmist did when he took from hence an occasion of Praise and Thanksgiving, *Praise the Lord O my Soul*, says he, and then mentioning some Characters of his Greatness, he adds, *Psal. 104. 4. He makes his Angels Spirits, and his Ministers a Flaming Fire.* Indeed the Angels are the greatest *Occasions* as well as *Instruments* of Praise, as being the Noblest part of the Divine Workmanship ; *Eccl. 43. 11. Look upon the Rain-bow, and Praise him that made it,* says the Son of Sirach : And if God is to be Praised for the Beauty of the Rain-Bow, caused only by various Reflections and Refractions of the Globules of the Second Element in their passage through a Cloud, how much

more is he to be adored for these great Master-pieces of his Art, these Closet-Draughts of his Beauty.

Secondly, We may take a Caution hence to beware of that *Voluntary Humility* which the Apostle speaks of ; and were he now alive, would have fresh Occasion given him to Condemn, in Worshipping Angels ; take heed to thy self, lest when thou liftest up thine Eyes to Heaven, and seest the Sun, and the Moon, and the Stars, even all the Host of Heaven, thou shouldest be driven to Worship them, says *Moses* to the People of *Israel* : *Deut.* 4. 19. And there is the same and greater danger here, when we Contemplate the Glory of this other Heavenly Host ; for however through Envy or Emulation we usually lessen and disparage one anothers Excellencies, yet when we have to do with Creatures of another rank and order, we are apt to be guilty of the opposite 'extream, and to exchange *Detraction* for *Idolatry*.

Thirdly, We have here a most excellent Antidote against *Pride*, which is a littleness of Mind that arises from our Ignorance of the World about us as well as of our Selves ; and consequently is best Cured by considering what Excellencies there are above us. The Young Home-bred Heir that thinks his Father's Mannour a considerable part of the World,



World, is sent abroad to see more of it, and returns Home Cured by his Travels. And would the Man that swells and looks big upon his Parts or Learning, but bestow a Thought or Two upon the Perfections of *Angels*, I dare warrant him his Plumes will quickly fall, and that he will never find in his Heart to set up for a Wit more: For alas, what are we to the Angels? Hereafter indeed 'tis to be hoped, that some of us may be made like them; but what are we in Comparison now? They excel us more than we do the Beasts of the Field, and we need nothing else but this one Consideration well thought upon to convince us, That *Pride was not made for Man*.

Fourthly, We may learn hence so to fear the Devil, as to look upon him as a considerable Adversary, and not to be too secure in our best Condition; for he is an Angel still, and we know not what he has lost by his Fall, besides that Grace and Goodness whereby he might be disposed to help and befriend us. And the Apostle tells us, that we still wrestle against Principalities and Powers: And therefore it concerns us to provide our selves accordingly, and as he there advises, to take unto us *the whole Armour of God, Ephes. 4.*

Lastly, we should endeavour to imitate all the Moral and Imitable Excellencies of



the good Angels; our Saviour has made them our Pattern in his *Prayer*, and we should make them so in our *Lives*, by endeavouring to perform God's Will in Earth as it is in Heaven: Which calls upon me to return to the Fourth Enquiry, namely, How far we are concerned to imitate this Pattern of Obedience.

That our Imitation of it is in some Measure or other required, is most certain, otherwise our Lord would never have taught us to Pray that God's Will should be done on Earth as it is in Heaven; but how far is the Question? In answer to which, I observe that the Obedience of the Angels may be considered either Intensively, or Extensively; or in other Words, either with respect to the Act, or with respect to the Object; which last may again be meant either of the kinds of Good, or of the several degrees in each kind.

This being premised, I answer, First, That we are not obliged to the *Intenseness* of Angelical Obedience; this I say we are not obliged to, because 'tis not among the *in ip'sum*, the things which are in our Power. This indeed will be part of our *Reward* hereafter, but it cannot be our *Duty* here; and therefore though we are to obey God readily and chearfully, yet 'tis not required we should

should do it with such a degree of Alacrity as excludes all imperfect motions to the contrary. 'Tis not required while we are a Compound of Flesh and Spirit, that the latter should be wholly free from the Solicitations of the former ; 'tis sufficient if it have the *Casting Voice*, and prevail in the Contention ; and so much indeed is Duty. And therefore says the Psalmist, *He that now goes on his way weeping, and beareth forth good Seed, shall doubtless come again with Joy, and bring his Sheaves with him : Psal. 126.* He must bear forth good Seed, and if he does so, it shall be no Prejudice to him that he goes on his way weeping.

Neither are we obliged to serve God always with equal heights of Devotion, and with an uniform fervency of Mind ; for besides that, our Saviour himself who led the most *Angelical Life*, Pray'd at some times *more earnestly* than at others ; this depends in a great measure upon the various junctures of Circumstances, and the various Imperfections of Objects from without, and the different fineness and quickness of the Animal Spirits within, with many other Accidental Dispositions which are not in our Power. We are only accountable for the Motions of our *Wills* ; and for ebbs and flows of Passion, no further than they are at the disposal of the other ; and therefore if we

Sail by a true Compass, and steer our Course to the right Point, we do our Duty, and are not Chargable for want of Gusty Blasts, and Swelling Sails, which are not in our Power to have.

Then Secondly, as to the Extensiveness of Angelical Obedience, if this be considered in the First Sense, with respect to the *kinds* of Good, we are certainly oblig'd to have our Obedience as Extensive as theirs, being bound to obey the whole Will of God. For the sincerity of our Obedience can no otherwise be justified than by its Universality and Uniformity; Uniformity as to the *Object*, though not as to the *Act*; and therefore 'tis that the Psalmist Prays, *O that my Ways were so direct that I might keep thy Statutes*; *Psal.* 119. so shall I not be confounded when I have respect unto all thy Commandments.

But if the Extensiveness of Angelical Obedience be considered in the latter Sense, with respect to the several *Degrees* in each kind of good, so we are not bound to come up to the Measures and Attainment of Angels, and that because 'tis beyond the Capacity of our present Condition. Nay, I think we are not strictly obliged under Pain of Sin, to attain to all the degrees of good which we possibly can, or always to do what is simply Best; for I think it plain from Scripture, that the Degrees of good admit of  
 Council



Council as well as Precept, and of Perfection as well as Duty : Much less therefore are we obliged to the full extensiveness of *Angelical* Obedience as thus consider'd : If we are not bound to *our* Best, much less to *their* Best.

But besides this way of considering the Extensiveness of the Angelical Obedience as to the kinds and degrees of Good, there is yet another, namely with respect to *Time* or *Continuance* ; this is what we otherwise call their Perseverance or Constancy of Obedience : Now as to the Measures of our Obligation to this, we are to distinguish and consider the Gospel in a double Capacity, as a *Law*, and as a *Covenant* ; if we consider it as a *Covenant*, then we are not obliged to a constant, and all the way a long continued Obedience. For 'tis not uninterrupted, but only final Perseverance that is the condition of the *Covenant*. But if we consider it as a *Law*, then we are not only obliged to a final, but to an uninterrupted Perseverance, that is, we are not only required to be found at our last *Exit* in a state of sincere Obedience, (which is the Condition of the *Covenant*,) but also to continue all the way in it : For every deliberate and voluntary interruption of it is Sin, and such as while unrepented of, will actually bring upon us Damnation.

Having thus in short stated the general Measure of our Conformity to the Angelical Pattern



Pattern, which are also the Measures of our Evangelical Obedience, I come now lastly to consider how *Reasonable* it is that we should do thus ; and certainly if any thing in the World be reasonable, 'tis that we should do the Will of God ; for the *Will* of God is the *highest Reason*. Indeed were God an Arbitrary Humorsom Being, that loved to domineer over his Creatures, and to impose on them harsh and troublesom Commands only for his own Pleasure, and to shew his Authority ; though even then we should justly owe him Homage and Obedience, yet there might be some pretence for disputing it, and making demurs about it. But God is so good and kind as to enjoin us nothing but what is pursuant of the End for which he Created us ; that is, our Happiness and Perfection : So kind as to link our Duty and Interest together, and to make those very things the Instances of our Obedience, which are the natural Means, and necessary Causes of our Happiness : So that were we to contrive a way to make our Condition Happy, we could pitch upon no better than what he has already prescribed to us in the Laws which he has given us. So highly consonant and *agreeable* are they to the frame of our Natures, and so absolutely *necessary* are they both to the order of this present World, and to the Happiness of the  
next.

next. This might easily be demonstrated of every one of the Divine Commandments in particular ; but that being too long an Undertaking for the close of a Discourse, I only consider that we have a certain ground to conclude what the Will of God must be in reference to us, by what he is in himself ; for this is an evident Principle, That such as God himself is, such must be his Will, it being unconceivable that he should will any thing contrary to his Nature. But now we all take God to be a Being Essentially and Immutably Wise and Good, Holy, Just and True ; and if these are Properties inseparable from the Nature of God (as all grant they are,) then the Will of God must also be Holy, Wise, Just, True and Good, and consequently highly fit and reasonable to be Obeyed.

But why O God do we want *Reason* to persuade us to do thy Will ? Is it not enough that it is *Thine* ? *Thine* who art the great Creator and Governour of the World, and hast the highest right to be served by all the *Creatures*, and by all the *Powers* which thou hast made ? *Thine*, who art the best and greatest Being, who art infinitely Wise, Holy, Just and True, and canst therefore command nothing but what is so ? *Thine*, who art above all capacity of addition to thy Happiness, and canst therefore propose no good but

but that of thy Creatures in the Laws that thou givest them? Why then do we inquire after the Reason of thy Will? It ought to satisfy us that it is *Thine*.

And since this Will of God is done in Heaven, why should it not be done on Earth? Since the Blessed Angels who can discern the Reasons of things, even the *deep things* of God, and are infinitely better able to judge of the Reasonableness of Obedience than we are; since *they* are so ready and forward to pay it, why should *we* make any Question or any Delay about it? Since the great Heavenly Host, those Excellent Beings that excel both in Wisdom and Strength, acknowledge and submit to the Government of God, why should we a little handful of Rebels, stand out? Since the Will of God is done in *Heaven*, why is it not on *Earth*? Yes, it is done on Earth, for at his Commandment the Waters flow, and the Wind and Storm fulfil his Word; only Man, disorderly Man, will not be Obedient, though he has a *God* for his Maker, and *Angels* for his *President*.

But let as many of us as hope to be like Angels hereafter, study to be like them here; let us seriously and diligently endeavour to write after so fair a Copy, and set before us the Holy Angels as *Patterns*, as well as *Observers*, in all our Actions, which would certainly work more upon us, than  
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that Expedient so much advised by a great Man, the imaginary presence of a *Cato* or a *Laelius*. Let us make it our care as much as in us lies, by the *Angelical* Piety and Regularity of our Lives, to restore the Moral World to that Symphony and Uniform Harmony wherein God made it, and not only *Pray*, but also heartily *Endeavour* that the Will of the great God may be done here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

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